THE VICTORIAN ERA SERIES

THE RISE OF DEMOCRACY

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The Victorian Era Series

The Rise of Democracy

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By

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General Preface.

As the present volume is introductory to the Victorian Era Series, it is proper to explain the purport of the series as a whole. It aims at describing in attractive and scholarly form the chief movements of our age and the lifework of its influential men. Each volume will deal with a well-defined subject, which it will exhibit in its historical setting and in its relation to present conditions. Collaboration, recognized as being an essential of modern historical work, has been adopted in this series, in that each volume will be the work of a writer who has made its subject a special study. This will, it is hoped, ensure the coherence of the individual volumes, and the unity and balance of the series as a whole.

In this volume I have endeavoured to describe, as fully as limits of space permit, the course of the political movement which has profoundly modified the whole of our public life. One remark as to the usage of terms seems to be called for here Throughout my inquiry I have used the term *democracy* in its strict sense, as *government by the people*, and not in the slipshod way in which it is now too often employed to denote the *wage-earning classes*. That this misuse of the term is responsible for much slipshod thought on political matters, will, I trust, be made clear in the latter part of this little work.

The Radical movement attained strength and persistence in the first years of Queen Victoria's reign; and its peaceful character has been due in no small degree to the loyalty awakened by the Queen's personal character and life. But in order to understand the aims of the Radicals who drew up the Charter, it is necessary to review the trend of events during the preceding generation, and to connect the political history of the present reign with the social and economic problems which became an urgent part of practical politics on the conclusion of the great war. After tracing the origin and general course of the Chartist movement, I have endeavoured to show its connection with the latter-day Radicalism, which led up to the Reform Acts of 1867

and 1884–85; and in the two closing chapters I have ventured on a brief examination of two of the burning questions of the day. In regard to these topics—Labour Legislation and Foreign Policy—I have striven calmly to look facts in the face, and to inquire by the light of the teachings of the past, what is the significance of the present situation. In one respect, the present time seems opportune for some such inquiry as is hazarded in this little work. The lull in the strife of political parties affords a good opportunity for a quiet consideration of our actual position and a deliberate survey of the course of the struggle. That there has been a striking change in the relations of parties and the conduct of the fight will be evident to all who contrast the political speeches of to-day with the excited harangues of 1880–5; while those again will seem tame beside the fervid declamations of the "forties".

In my treatment of the more strictly historical parts of the subject, I have purposely given only the briefest reference to many politicians who figure largely in Parliamentary annals or in the gossip of Pall Mall. My desire has been rather to dwell on the efforts of humbler individuals, who stirred up the artisans of England to action which finally compelled responsible statesmen to listen to their demands. I have accordingly bestowed more attention on William Cobbett than on Viscount Melbourne, on Henry Vincent than on Lord John Russell. In some directions this little work essays to open up new ground, and where I have described well-known events I have endeavoured to invest them with a new significance by approaching them from the point of view of the workman's club rather than of the lobby of St. Stephen's. In relation to Free-trade, Irish affairs, educational efforts, and the work of several influential thinkers and statesmen, my narrative may seem incomplete; but these topics will be handled in other volumes of the series.

My indebtedness to other workers in this field is, I believe, everywhere acknowledged in foot-notes. For valuable advice on several topics I must express my grateful acknowledgments to Mr. G. Laurence Gomme, and to Messrs. C. V. Coates and G. W. Johnson, both of Trinity College, Cambridge.

J. H. ROSE.

BALHAM, S.W., *October* 15, 1897.

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The Rise of Democracy.

Chapter I.

The Origin of English Radicalism.

Any inquiry into the course of democratic progress in England would be confessedly flimsy and superficial which did not endeavour, however briefly, to indicate the nature of the movement in its earlier stages. Is English democracy of home growth, or does it owe its chief impulse to the cognate movement in France? Was it propelled onwards by a conscious striving after new ideals, or was it merely the result of discontent aroused by material discomforts and unjust laws? Did our Radical reformers claim that they were initiating a new era for humanity at large, or were they content with redressing the ills of the time? To these and similar questions it is hoped that this little work will furnish some reply, not, as a rule, explicitly and in set terms, but rather by means of an unbiassed narrative which will leave the reader free to draw his own conclusions as to the drift of events, the full significance of which cannot as yet be fully realized.

A few words may not be out of place here to suggest one important difference which separates the democracy of the last hundred years from that of the ancient world. Popular government, as we now know it, aims at conceding full political rights and duties to all adult males who are not obviously disqualified properly to discharge

them. We should now deny the name of democrat to any who would withhold these rights from a majority of the adult men of the state. In the ancient world, on the other hand, popular government never contemplated, even as a possible contingency, that civic responsibility should ever be accorded to the slaves, on whom fell nearly all the burdens of menial employments. Government was therefore in the hands of a minority, sometimes of a small minority. Oftener still it was the tool of a faction; but there is no instance of a defeated faction deliberately enfranchising the hewers of wood and drawers of water in order to compass the overthrow of its successful rivals. Such a proposal would have been wholly unintelligible to the democrats of ancient Greece and Rome.[1]

The political and social problems which modern democracy has endeavoured to solve are therefore immeasurably wider and grander than any which came within the ken of the philosophers and statesmen of the ancient world. To what influence are we to attribute the broadening and humanizing tendencies of modern politics? Primarily to the love of individual liberty cherished by the Teutonic tribes which laid the foundations of a new social order throughout Western Europe. Their sense of the dignity of man as man, when strengthened by Christian teaching, opened up a new future, which was to receive its fullest and most unfettered development in England. It was here that representative government found its first complete expression in a national Parliament as the guardian of popular liberties—a fact which decisively answers the question as to the native origin of our democracy in its early or mediæval phase. But the question as to the origin of the great impulse towards popular government charac-

[1] Cf. Aristotle's *Nic. Ethics*, bk. x. chap. 6: "No one allows a slave to share in happiness any more than in the life of a citizen".

teristic of the last century scarcely admits of so clear an answer; for under the warping influence of time, intrigue, and war, the essentially democratic features of our earlier parliamentary system were gradually effaced, until there seemed to be some danger that the masterful influence of George III., and the bribes skilfully administered by the "King's Friends", would degrade the constitution of the United Kingdom to the level of that of the Electorate of Hanover.

It was at this crisis of our history, when our affairs seemed about "to be hurried into the rage of civil violence or to sink into the dead repose of despotism", that a great thinker, renowned not less for his conservatism than his candour, reawakened the flame of patriotic enthusiasm for our ancient constitutional liberties. In his *Thoughts upon the Present Discontents* (1770) Burke complained that the House of Commons was beginning to exercise control *upon* the people, whereas "it was designed as a control *for* the people". Lifting up his voice in protest against the insidious influence of the secret Cabal, which intrigued in the supposed interests of the king, he called on the people to defeat its aims by compelling public men to pay attention first and foremost to public opinion, so that the House of Commons might again become, what it ought to be, "the express image of the feelings of the nation". To this end the whole body of the people must be called in to watch the proceedings of Parliament, must distribute lists of the votes given by members, and by the pressure of public opinion must seek to diminish the subservience of the House of Commons to the crown. Not that Burke was republican: far from it. His aim all through his political career was to restore and then to maintain that balance of powers between Crown, Lords, and Commons which he regarded as the essential feature of the English constitution.

An interesting result of his protest, and of the excitement arising out of the prosecutions of Wilkes, was soon to be seen. In 1780 a band of energetic reformers, among whom Major Cartwright and Horne Tooke were the most prominent, founded the Society for Constitutional Information, which published several pamphlets to prove the urgent need of parliamentary reform. At a meeting of the society presided over by the great Whig orator, Charles James Fox, a programme, which was destined to be revived fifty-eight years later by the Chartists, was adopted as summarizing the aims of zealous Whig reformers. It comprised the following as its most prominent demands—annual parliaments, universal suffrage, equal voting districts, abolition of the property qualification for members of Parliament, payment of members, and vote by ballot at parliamentary elections. Only by the attainment of these reforms, so the society affirmed, could the House of Commons regain its old position as the guardian of the people's liberties against all encroachments by the other estates of the realm.

But, apart from their historical significance, these proceedings of the first important reform club were without any immediate result. Parliament and people alike yawned at the mere mention of reform; and after seemingly fruitless efforts at educating public opinion, the society decently expired. Its work, however, was not to perish. The exposure of the abuses of court patronage, and of the sordid obsequiousness of a Parliament of borough-mongers, was soon to arouse a storm of indignation when the lightning flashes of the French Revolution of 1789 lit up the darkness of the night. At once the old apathy to matters political disappeared as if by magic. Scores of clubs were founded on the model of the famous Jacobin Club of Paris, and several of them essayed to imitate the trenchant vigour of the attacks of

Robespierre's disciples on old institutions. Certainly the Gothic irregularities of the English political edifice favoured the attacks of the "radical reformers"—a name now first used in the heated controversies of the time to denote those who would tolerate no mere patchwork, but demanded a reconstruction of the old edifice on an essentially popular basis. The Birmingham Club distinguished itself by a vigorous attack on the abuses and absurdities of our electoral system, declaring in its manifesto that the constitution was a venerable fraud, and that seats for the House of Commons were sold as openly as stalls for cattle at a fair. The same facts, when set forth in more academic language by reformers in 1780, had evoked no general response. Yet, in 1792, English public opinion seemed about to become scarcely less Jacobinical than that of France. In both lands the extreme reformers were in a small minority; but the decision of their views and the weakness of the systems which they attacked seemed to promise a speedy triumph to democracy of the most advanced type. But the impulse which came from France, though potent, was transient. The diversion of her democratic ardour into the alluring vistas of military glory, opened up by Bonaparte, soon alienated her warmest admirers on these shores; and the wave of French political influence ebbed almost as rapidly as it had flowed over our land. In Parliament its effect had been even directly unfavourable to the cause which Horne Tooke and Cartwright had championed. Many friends of the movement, alarmed and disgusted by the levelling doctrines which had permeated the political clubs, withdrew their support from motions for reform, which seemed tainted with Jacobinism. Burke, formerly the champion of electoral reform, now included this in his list of the deadly sins of democracy. Pitt asserted that the time was inopportune for considering resolutions similar to those which

he had repeatedly urged in the previous decade; and the end of the century saw the prospects of democracy gloomier even than amidst the torpor of 1780. Then there was the apathy of ignorance and sheer Saxon stolidity: now there was a keen sense of disgust at the facile perversion of French democracy by the baubles of power skilfully dangled by Napoleon. The new creed that promised to renovate the world had apparently led only to the triumph of militarism and the spoliation of neighbouring peoples by a nation which bowed its own neck to the yoke in order the more completely to subjugate others.

> "I find nothing great:
> Nothing is left which I can venerate;
> So that almost a doubt within me springs
> Of Providence, such emptiness at length
> Seems at the heart of all things."

These were the feelings of Wordsworth, when now in 1803 he regarded the heart-breaking finale of all the wild hopes and aspirations aroused by the French Revolution of 1789, of which he had sung—

> "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive;
> But to be young was very heaven".

Nor was it only the sensitive temperament of the poet which acutely felt the disillusionment. The same tone of pessimism pervades the writings of many of the publicists of the day, who had welcomed the fall of the Bastille as the beginning of a new era for the whole human race. A new generation had to arise, oppressed by other evils than those of war, distracted by new social and industrial problems, before the ardour for reform could revive; and when again it gathered strength, its inspiration was drawn from native sources.

But, apart from the sudden chill which the personality and career of Napoleon cast over English reformers,

there were other influences of a more directly practical nature which led the younger leaders to adopt methods consonant with the traditions of the land of Hampden. Indeed, most of the men who had been imbued with French Jacobinism passed away in the period 1793–1815, or lived in exile, leaving the venerable Major Cartwright as almost the sole connecting link between the earlier generation of reformers and those who now arose to grapple with the grievances and problems bequeathed to posterity by the war period. To his genial moderating influence we may justly ascribe the good sense which generally characterized the efforts of the young English democrats. His influence it was which helped to turn them back into the old paths, and pointed to the constitutional programme of 1780 as the goal of popular strivings.

The adoption of a practical scheme of reform, such as could conceivably be gained by constitutional means, was indeed the urgent need of the time. Never was the United Kingdom in a more parlous state than when the crowning triumph of Waterloo placed it at the head of the nations. It was but a short distance from the Capitol of military triumph to the Tarpeian rock of sedition and civil strife. Four short years separated Waterloo from Peterloo. Never has a nation been more perplexed and dismayed by the sudden drop from glory to misery, from national exultation to civil discord, than the people of England in 1815.[1] In this sudden awakening from the glamour of an unparalleled military triumph to the stern realities unveiled by peace, we may find an explanation of the rapid growth of a Radicalism which was far more deeply rooted than that of 1780, and far more practical than that of 1790. The industrial and social

[1] Lowe in his *Present State of England* (1823), ch. 2, remarks how unexpected, even by experienced financiers, was the misery which came with the peace.

causes contributing to this discontent accordingly claim a brief review before we examine the resulting political efforts.

Patriots who, in the year of Waterloo, looked solely on the surface of things, very naturally concluded that the might of England was unbounded. They pointed to the growth of her revenue from £19,258,000 in 1792 (the last year before the wars) to the gigantic total of £105,698,000 in 1814. What limits were there to her resources, they exclaimed, when, in spite of enormous losses in men and treasure, the prices of agricultural produce and the rent of land had doubled within that period? As for our manufactures, the annual value of our exports of cotton goods had trebled in the years 1801–1814; and the growing wealth of the community was attested by the increasingly luxurious manners adopted by our upper and middle classes. All this was undeniably true. It aroused the wonder and admiration of Mr. Colquhoun, author of *The Resources of the British Empire*, at the growth of wealth which seemed to be unchecked even by all the waste of warfare.

Had these cheery optimists pursued their researches further, they would probably have found that much of the prosperity was of a wholly artificial character. A good deal of it was due to the war expenditure; and the expenditure of energy and wealth in warfare is no more nutritive than the process of "feeding a dog on its own tail". Though the propertied classes gallantly met the annual claim of two shillings in the pound on their incomes, yet most of the financial burden was bequeathed to future generations. After Waterloo, the nation had to bear the burden of a national debt which amounted in all to more than £861,000,000, entailing a yearly interest of £32,600,000. When we remember that the currency had been debased by an influx of paper notes of doubtful value, we can realize the intensity of the

strain resulting from the return to ordinary conditions of industrial and financial life. We can also understand the popularity gained by that wrong-headed, warm-hearted champion of the working-classes, William Cobbett, when he exclaimed to many an excited crowd that the country could not and must not bear this burden, but must make a clean sweep of the debt and then start clear. It was, indeed, a working-man's question, when the debt imposed an annual charge of thirty shillings per head on every inhabitant of these islands, and when that burden rested mainly on the necessaries of life and the means of production. In this grievance is to be found the chief motive power of democratic movements after 1815.[1] But, besides piling up an enormous debt, the war bequeathed many other difficulties of an industrial and social nature. The supremacy of our industries and of our commerce was very largely the result of the Napoleonic wars. Our land had undergone none of those invasions which had all but ruined the trade and industries of every continental country. After Trafalgar our merchantmen sailed in comparative safety, while French ships, and even those of the neutrals, were well-nigh swept off the seas; and even our mighty foe confessed the collapse of his efforts to strangle British trade when his agents ordered English cloaks to supply the French troops campaigning on the Vistula, and sugar from the British West Indies for the imperial table. England was the middleman between the Continent of Europe and the rest of the world.[2] But would her monopoly survive the advent of peace? Would not rather her manufacturers and merchant princes be ruined when trade resumed its natural course? The question

[1] At the end of his *Political Register* of Oct. 5, 1816, Cobbett confidently prophesies that the national debt will lead to parliamentary reform.

[2] I have treated this question in my article "Napoleon and English Commerce", in the *English Historical Review* of Oct. 1893.

was indeed most serious; and but for our rapid advances in labour-saving machinery, we might have suffered a complete collapse. As it was, the value of our cotton goods exported sank from £20,600,000 in 1815, to an average of £16,400,000 for the next decade; while the decline in the value of the woollen goods exported was so persistent as not to be made up, until the reforms of Sir Robert Peel breathed new life into our industries.

The gravity of the social crisis which faced us after Waterloo will be realized if we glance very briefly at the industrial changes then progressing in our land. The invention of spinning-machines by Hargreaves, Crompton, and others in the years 1764–1779, and the subsequent application of steam-power had already begun to ruin the spinning-wheel industry, by which wives and daughters had often kept the wolf from the door; and after 1803 Dr. Cartwright's power-loom began to press hard on hand-loom weavers. Toil as these Silas Marners might, they could not successfully compete with untiring machinery, every improvement in which reduced the price of cloth, and ground them down into the ever-rising stratum of wage-earners. Two facts will suffice to illustrate the magnitude of the changes brought about by the alchemy of steam-power. Mr. Gaskell, the author of a work *Artisans and Machinery*, has computed that the cost price of a "piece" of cloth of the same quality was reduced in the years 1800–1820 from twenty-five to eight shillings; and that enlightened manufacturer, Robert Owen, whose social aims will be described in the following chapter, stated to a committee of the House of Commons in 1816 that the cotton-mills of Great Britain were then producing as much as could be made by eighty millions of operatives working without machinery. These startling assertions reveal the causes of our wealth during the great war when the Continental peoples were industrially dependent on us,

and of the distress which overtook us when those nations, turning to the pursuits of peace, began to imitate our inventions and encroach on our markets. The brunt of the distress caused by over-production and the fall of prices, was of course felt most acutely by the wage-earners, who clustered about that cheerless nucleus of modern life—the factory.

But the misery, which was to be the chief propelling power of democracy in England, was fed from yet another source. Side by side with these industrial changes, an agricultural revolution had slowly but surely ruined our sturdy yeomen farmers, and had often dispossessed peasants of small but invaluable rights over common fields and common pasturage. The changes had begun in the earlier half of the previous century, when the general cultivation of root-crops broke up the old wasteful system of farming on the open fields and necessitated enclosure and the application of improved methods. But these changes, which, according to Arthur Young, might have been beneficial even to the peasantry had they been carried out gradually and wisely, were forced on with feverish activity under the stimulus of the great war, when the price of wheat often rose to £6 a quarter. The Napoleonic war cut us off from free intercourse with the Baltic lands, on which we had mainly to rely; the United States were closed to our ships; and no one had ever dreamt of importing corn from La Plata and India, much less from our feeble settlements in Australia. In face of the risk of actual famine which confronted us in wet summers, there was every need to increase the yield of corn; and long experience had shown that this could only be achieved by enclosing the open fields, often worked on a sort of communal system, and by adopting improved methods of husbandry on large holdings. As many as 1931 parishes in England and Wales applied to Parliament during the war period for powers to enclose

their "open" fields and common lands; and even when, after Waterloo, prices fell to their normal level, enclosures continued in diminished numbers.

The chief results of these enclosures were an enormous increase in the agricultural wealth of the country, and a lamentable falling off in the independence of the peasantry.

> "Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
> Where wealth accumulates and men decay.

Thus Goldsmith had warned us of the social evils which would result from the enclosure of commons; and the vision of the poet was on the whole as true as the arguments of the agricultural reformers who advocated the change. Many a parish was severely crippled by the expense of gaining the special act of Parliament which was required; and the reallotment of the common fields and wastes gave many opportunities for sheer robbery. In these cases, we may imagine, the iron of injustice drove deep into the minds of the dispossessed cotters, as they left the country, or sank to the position of wage-earners. Even where there was no fraud, the poor and the shiftless benefited little by a change which demanded the application of skill, energy, and capital to the soil. Myriads of peasants who had jogged along comfortably on the produce of their arable plots and pasturage rights, eking it out, perhaps, by work at the spinning-wheel and the hand-loom, now saw all hope of independence vanish when science came to be applied to agriculture as well as to manufactures. Previously they had been half "manufacturers", half farmers; but the specialization of callings which marks the nineteenth century was sooner or later fatal to their nondescript existence. They fell, as it were, between two stools; and those who had neither the money nor the energy to become skilled manufacturers or successful farmers, sank to the

position of day-labourers on the land, or floated away as social drift-wood into the seething eddies of the new factory townships.

In his thoughtful inquiry into the development of human society, Mr. Kidd has pointed out that changes which have developed the nation's resources have been fatal to the independence and welfare of the individual. It may be questioned whether the remark is as widely applicable as is claimed by that able writer. But it certainly is true of the manufacturing and agricultural changes which were in progress at the time of the great war. The events of the war rendered those changes far more sudden, and therefore more harmful to our social system, than they would otherwise have been. The monopoly enjoyed by our manufacturers and merchants during the war gave to our trade an unhealthy stimulus, the ruinous effects of which were acutely felt after the return to ordinary conditions. The same remark applies to our rural life. The monopoly in food-supply enjoyed by our landlords and farmers in these islands forced on a change which might perhaps otherwise have been gradual and devoid of evil social results. The nation was saved from financial ruin by being able suddenly to draw upon two almost unworked sources of wealth; but the drain was really at the expense of future vitality. Our commerce and agriculture were apparently never so flourishing as in the year of Waterloo; but the show of prosperity was gained at the expense of industrial and social changes which were deeply resented by our working-classes.

There were special reasons why this resentment should take a political form. Any inquiry into the details of public expenditure sufficed to convict government of reckless extravagance and a shameless prodigality in the bestowal of sinecures. Indeed, many a champion of retrenchment and reform jumped to the wholly erro-

neous conclusion that the war against Napoleon had been got up for the benefit of the governing classes. This contention, as absurd as it was unpatriotic, very properly doomed the opposition to impotence, until the great struggle for European independence had been fought and won. The dawn of peace tended to restore the old relations of parties. The Tories were the champions not only of monarchical prerogatives, but also of many of the regulations adopted by Pitt and his followers to check the progress of French democratic ideas. The Whig party, which had been cleft asunder by the schism of Burke and Fox, and had been further weakened by the adoption of a nagging anti-national policy through the war period, now began to recover something of its old prestige. Not that it had as yet definitely adopted the policy of parliamentary reform. Disgusted by the failure of democracy on the Continent, and by the schism which it had caused in the once formidable Whig party, the leaders held suspiciously aloof from this dangerous principle until the efforts of working-men democrats again forced the question into the sphere of "practical politics". For the present, only the more adventurous Whigs lent any support to "radical reformers" in their efforts to annul or mitigate the harsh legislation of the war period. The independent attitude of artisan reformers can readily be understood in the light of partisan politics of the time, and by the lurid glare shed from industrial and agrarian grievances. Their industrial independence was gone; they had become wage-earners, and yet they were forbidden by law to combine for any purpose. Prevented from combining for a rise of wages, they saw Parliament pass a law which seemed to be designed solely to keep up the price of corn in the interests of landlords and farmers. Indignation made them politicians. The determination to gain the right of combination in trade-unions, and to secure bread

at its natural price, inevitably led the leaders of the labouring classes to press for a drastic measure of electoral reform. Out of the depressing conditions of their homes discontent arose as naturally as malaria from a marsh. With little artificial aid from any agitators, except from one who will presently be noticed, the two most characteristic working-class movements of our day—Trade-unionism and Chartism—began to gather force and volume. The former aimed at confronting master manufacturers with an equality of power; while the Radicals, and later the Chartists, hoped to restore to the working-classes all, and more than all, their old rights through the instrumentality of Parliament.

It was natural that the attention of working-men should first be directed to electoral reform. In the autumn of 1815 our legislators passed the famous Corn Law, with the aim of keeping up the average price of wheat to about eighty shillings per quarter, a price which was declared to be "reasonable between the farmer, landlord, and public". Until home corn had reached that price, foreign corn was to be completely excluded from our ports. Had this Corn Law been passed as a temporary expedient for preventing the sudden collapse of our greatest industry, few reasonable men would have agitated against it. The average price of wheat in the previous five years had been close on a hundred shillings a quarter; and the farmers, whose toil had saved the country from starvation, might reasonably claim some guarantee against a headlong fall in the price of corn, such as might probably result from the advent of peace. But the Parliament of landlords apparently desired that the Corn Law of 1815 should be permanent, and that the rapid growth of our population should drive wheat up to a price which now appeared "reasonable" to them, though it was nearly double the average price of the years 1760–1790. The men of

London and Westminster made vehement demonstrations against the bill during its discussion. It was in vain. The bill became law. The marked preference thus shown for the interests of the country over those of the towns led to various disturbances. Bakers' shops were pillaged; and the popular excitement, after once breaking bounds, portended indiscriminate destruction. Bands of operatives roamed through the factory townships, smashing the new hated machines; and discharged soldiers and sailors often joined the rioters, to show their hatred of a government which neglected them while it pampered the Prince Regent and his minions. Amidst the ferment in the towns the followers of Dr. Spence, who desired a general levelling of property, found a favourable opportunity of disseminating their ideas; and, as will presently appear, one of their meetings was to have a noteworthy result. Misery breeds political nostrums as rapidly as an epidemic favours the sale of quack remedies: and it may be questioned whether the English public has ever been so plied with infallible recipes—of the "Morrison" type—as in the generation succeeding Waterloo. That an ignorant populace, when oppressed by grievous burdens, when perplexed by strange symptoms, when distracted by rival nostrums, should ultimately have selected the means which have peacefully tended to the healing of the body politic, argues a statesmanlike instinct which is surely unequalled in the world's history. Among the restorative processes which have been at work, democracy of the English type may certainly be reckoned as one of the chief. We are now in a position to understand the chief steps in the renovation of the nation's life.

The outlook in 1816 was certainly gloomy. Statesmen and people were alike perplexed by the increase of misery and discontent, when they had looked for peace and prosperity. The discontent, though wide-spread,

was vague and purposeless, until by the action of a group of Radicals, whose chief thinkers will be noticed in the next chapter, it became concentrated on a demand for a complete reform of Parliament. Foremost among the more popular champions of Radicalism stands a burly and pugnacious personage who claims some attention.

Few Englishmen of this century have exerted a wider and more powerful influence on the progress of democracy than William Cobbett. His position as the first English newspaper editor who caught the ear of the people and made the press a permanent power, would entitle him to notice here, even if he had not given a powerful impulse to parliamentary reform. That he did not earn for himself the higher renown of a legislative reformer was due to the strange defects which marred an otherwise striking character. His personality, like his career, is a tissue of inconsistencies and contradictions. The son of a farmer of Farnham in Surrey, he spent his youth as a copying clerk in Gray's Inn. To escape from this drudgery, he enlisted as a soldier and served for seven years under the union-jack in Nova Scotia, occupying his leisure time there with study and courtship. Returning to England, he obtained his discharge in 1791 and proceeded to France, where he learnt the language and declaimed against the Revolution with all the fervour of a devoted royalist. On the approach of war between France and England, he set sail for America; and, as a bookseller in Philadelphia, he strove, in a paper called the *Porcupine*, to prick the bubbles of democratic enthusiasm. The success of his royalist propaganda may be measured by his own statement, that there were in that city about ten thousand persons who would have rejoiced to see him murdered, while not more than fifty would have stirred an inch to save him. He next flitted to his native shores, there to live in the turmoil ever dear to him; and as the English government

was exceedingly unpopular, he gave it the support of his fretful quills. But a change came over the spirit of the *Porcupine*, or the *Weekly Register* as he now renamed it. A slight from the frigid William Pitt changed the loyalty of the editor to bitter dislike of the government, which was later on envenomed by the imposition of a heavy fine and two years' imprisonment for certain libellous articles. Thenceforth the cloak of Tom Paine fell on Cobbett's shoulders, together with a double portion of his mordant powers of sarcasm and abuse. He reduced the price of his *Register* to twopence, and held up to execration not only the government but all who differed from him. He therefore had abundant materials at hand for his facile pen. The abuses of government were notorious; and his impulsive and vindictive temperament constantly brought him into collision with nearly all prominent men, even those of the opposition. The Radical member for Westminster, Sir Francis Burdett, on whom Cobbett had showered praises as the saviour of the country, was suddenly denounced as the type of all that was mean and base; Hunt "the patriot" shrank into Hunt "the greatest of liars"; and O'Connell, from being "the glory of Ireland", was execrated as "a vile vagabond". Genial and good-natured though he was at home, stout and hearty though he was in physique, Cobbett almost rivalled Rousseau in the morbid sensitiveness which was ever detecting imaginary insults, and in the persistence with which he nursed his revenge. Such men may initiate a movement, but they are the ruin of every party or association which they seek to found or regulate.

And yet the bluff south countryman was not without his sterling qualities. His determination to educate himself and his fellows was to have a most important influence on English working-men of that period. His sketches of home-life and of the joy of training a family

revealed new possibilities to the men of that generation; and in his *Rural Rides*, the descriptions of scenery and the dog-like patience of our peasantry are presented with the freshness and pathos of Rousseau himself. The enormous mass and unfailing vigour of his writings evoked from the *Standard* the startling statement that he was unrivalled since the time of Swift for clearness, force, and power of copious illustration. For "twenty-nine years—eleven weeks only excepted"—his weekly paper regularly appeared to excite the interest or the passions of our people. It is true that its variety and vigour were largely due to the almost canine pugnacity of the editor, and to other qualities which favour the output of "copy". So numerous were the water-tight compartments of his brain that he could freely dismiss the memory of past errors and gleefully proceed to alienate newly-made allies or cudgel another set of opponents, while the vigour and sustained power of his attacks gained the admiration of an athletic people, even apart from the respect felt for his manly exposure of political abuses.

Such was the man who now led the popular demand for a drastic reform of Parliament. In his paper of October 26, 1816, he demanded that the House of Commons should be elected *annually by all the tax-payers of the land*; and that all other questions should be secondary to this. "Let us have this reform first, and all other good things will be given unto us." This determined agitation commenced by Cobbett may be considered the definite commencement of Radicalism in its nineteenth-century guise. Others, it is true, had agitated for yet larger demands; but, for reasons which we have now considered, they had made no permanent impression on our people. Now, however, amidst the distress which followed on the great war, Cobbett's agitation was to have important results.

Samuel Bamford, a weaver of Middleton near Manchester, records in his memoirs that the comparative absence of riots after 1816 was due to Cobbett's advice to working-men to agitate for a complete reform of Parliament, and that they thenceforth became deliberate and systematic in their proceedings. They started "Hampden Clubs" in all the towns and villages of South Lancashire, and speakers crossed the Pennines to stir up the more apathetic Yorkshiremen. Delegates of the federated clubs drew up a political programme which demanded annual election of Parliaments; exclusion of all "placemen"; that every man of more than eighteen years of age, who paid taxes, should have a vote; that every 20,000 inhabitants should send a member to the House of Commons; and that "talent and virtue should be the only qualifications necessary" for members.

This early stage of the Radical movement was marked —at least in the provinces—by a constant reliance on moral suasion, and by a determination to hand over to the police any who advocated violent methods. But the more impressionable Londoners provoked a contest with the government, which marred the prospects of the movement. The pillage of shops consequent on a mass meeting held in November, 1816, at Spa Fields, near Islington, was followed by repressive measures of so drastic a nature that freedom of speech and of meeting was, for the time, at an end; and Cobbett retired to America.[1] These measures roused so bitter a feeling in the Hampden Clubs, that several of the Scottish clubs bound themselves by oath to further their cause "either by moral or by physical strength, as the case may re-

[1] Even the Union Debating Society at Cambridge was for a time suppressed. Macaulay, then at Trinity College, had a striking proof of the results of suppressing public meetings. While the townsmen were asserting their indignation in a riot, the future historian received a dead cat full in the face.

quire"—the first sign of that divergence of aim which later on was to divide the Chartists.

Indeed, the Radical movement of the years 1816–1819 curiously foreshadows the Chartist movement, which was to be its complete expression. There was at both epochs a desire on the part of nearly all the first leaders to pursue strictly legal methods; there was the same growth of indignation among the masses of the people at the apathy of Parliament; the same split into the "moral force" and "physical force" sections, the same collapse of the efforts of the more daring spirits, and the same final gain of the more practicable proposals of the "moral force" men.

The breach between the operatives and Parliament yawned wider in the years 1817 to 1819. The deepening distress of those years, enhanced by a return from a paper-money system to cash payments, would alone have produced rebellious feelings; but these were fanned into a flame by the lavish expenditure on pensions, sinecures, and the tawdry splendour of the Regent's court. The Hampden Clubs, debarred from open debate, began to drill their members, ostensibly for the more orderly management of great mass meetings, when these, in 1818, again became legal; but their ulterior aim probably was to overawe Parliament by a display of physical force. Yet, even in these mass meetings the proceedings were at first quite orderly. The men of Birmingham adopted a novel method of protesting against the electoral absurdities which excluded their town from direct representation in Parliament, and gave to thirteen Cornish villages far more legislative power than was then enjoyed by all the new manufacturing towns of Great Britain. On the advice of the veteran reformer Major Cartwright, the citizens of the great midland town assembled in mass meeting and chose a Radical Staffordshire baronet, Sir Charles Wolseley, to act as "legisla-

torial attorney" for Birmingham, and to present their claims in person to the House of Commons. Had they acted in the spirit of our old English constitution, they might with equal reason have sent him as their member; for it is probable that the Witan, or councillors who shared with the Saxon kings the right of making laws, were chosen by the shout of the people at their folk-moots. There was nothing revolutionary in the action of the men of Birmingham; but unluckily their legislatorial attorney, inflated with pride at his unique title, uttered a seditious harangue at Stockport, which lodged him in the county jail. Nothing daunted, the men of Manchester determined to elect a "legislatorial attorney", and arranged a monster meeting to be held in St. Peter's Field, just outside their town, under the presidency of "Orator" Hunt.

Their choice of a chairman could scarcely have been more unwise, had they designed to arouse the fears of the rich and the passions of the poor. Society had made Henry Hunt lord of the manor of Glastonbury; but nature had made him an agitator. His restless temperament, fluent tongue, powerful voice, and morbid vanity, found in the mass meetings of the north a more congenial sphere than in the humdrum proceedings of the court leet of Glastonbury. That the storms of Parliament called forth his best efforts may be seen in this contemporary sketch of him in *Blackwood's Magazine*:— "A comely, tall, rosy, white-headed, mean-looking, well-gartered tradesman, of, I take it, 60. His only merits are his impudence and his voice, both unique. In vain do all sides of the House of Commons unite to cough, shuffle, groan, and shout. He pauses for a moment, until the clamour is at its height, and then, re-pitching his notes, apparently without an effort, lifts his halloo as clear and distinct above the storm as ever ye heard a minster bell tolling over the racket of a village wake."

These powers, however, count for little unless controlled and directed by a well-balanced brain, of the possession of which Hunt could not be accused by his bitterest foes. In his nature the emotions held unchallenged sway; and his rancorous oratory helped to infect a whole generation with a passion for invective, until the quieter style of Cobden and Bright restored to our platform oratory its earlier dignity. When Hunt faced a throng of reformers to ventilate some grievance, his figure seemed instinct with suppressed fury; his eyes became distended and almost blood-shot; his griped hand beat the air as if to annihilate the Tory ministers; and his whole manner betokened a vehemence of passion which at times could scarcely find utterance. With such a chairman, the St. Peter's Field meeting could scarcely fail to end in a "Peterloo".

Secret drills on the Lancashire moors had also alarmed the authorities; and when dense columns of men began to march to Manchester on the morning of August 12, the troops and the yeomanry were held in readiness. Yet the operatives of Lancashire carried no arms; they were dressed in their Sunday best; and the laurels carried by their front ranks betokened a peaceable demonstration, as was further shown by the mottoes on their banners—"Liberty and Fraternity", "Parliaments Annual", "Suffrage Universal", and "No Corn Laws". One black banner, displaying the threatening words "Equal Representation or Death", seemed to recall the times of Danton and Marat; but in general the vast demonstration promised an observance of the best traditions of the land of Hampden.

A mighty shout was raised when Hunt appeared on the wagons that formed the hustings, and yet the magistrates determined to serve then and there the writ of arrest which the orator had brought on himself by some frothy talk about the bloody butchers of Waterloo.

The constables bearing the writ, and their escort of yeomanry, were soon wedged in among the crowd; whereupon the magistrates ordered the hussars to liberate the volunteer horsemen, who were now beginning to ply their swords in grim earnest. As the cavalry swept into the densely-packed field, the crowd broke into a panic-stricken rush; and the space which had been filled with a good-humoured, orderly throng, speedily became a scene of wild disorder, strewn with torn banners, maimed and bleeding figures, and ghastly heaps of writhing humanity at the further edge of the field. There were comparatively few deaths, for the hussars never disgraced their swords by using the edge; but the wounds lavishly dealt by the volunteer horsemen aroused a feeling of class hatred, which was intensified when government approved the action of the magistrates and struck a medal in honour of the exploits of the yeomanry. The gag was again stringently applied by Parliament in the repressive measures known as the Six Acts; and the tide of democratic feeling was dammed up for a time, until, gathering strength from sheer indignation, it swept away many of the old oligarchical barriers in the Reform Bill of 1832.

Chapter II.

Radicals and the Reform Bill of 1832.

The foregoing sketch of the Radical movement of 1816–1819 is a necessary introduction to the study of the later democratic movement; for only those who have realized the orderly character of the earlier democratic agitation, and the indignation caused by its brutal repression, can possibly understand either the pent-up

enthusiasm for reform which forced on the measure of 1832, or the disappointment at its immediate results.

But other influences were also at work, tending to discredit our old political system and to emphasize the demand for reform. An intellectual movement was gathering such force as to portend ruin to all institutions which could not justify their existence. In the France of 1789 the crash of the revolutionary storm had been heralded by premonitory mutterings and by protests of leading thinkers; and so too in England the same warnings might be observed by the weather-wise. A great Italian thinker has said that ideas rule the world, and that what we call a revolution is but the passage of an idea from theory to practice. Certain it is that no great and abiding change has ever taken place in the body politic without some premonition from the brain politic The general course of the reform movement was what had been foretold by our chief thinkers, the most important among whom, in the years 1800–1830, was Jeremy Bentham.

It would be far beyond the scope of this little work to attempt a description of the utilitarian philosophy. Its connection with politics, especially with the philosophic Radicalism of which Bentham was the founder, may, however, be understood from the central principle of his creed—the promotion of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". His whole system of ethics and politics was severely utilitarian. It may indeed be compared to an arch, which has as its key-stone this principle, serving to unite his theoretical and political speculations, and to interlock them in a dogmatic whole. The new creed was soon to prove itself subversive of modes of thought and of institutions which rested only on prescription and tradition. Utility was a crucial test when rigorously applied to the Gothic irregularities of the British constitution; and Bentham was nothing if

not rigorous.[1] Exact methods of thought and reasoning were to be the sole guide of the philosophic and political inquirer. Sentiment, devotion, chivalry, appeals to the continuity of national life, all were excluded from the argument; and man was treated as if he were merely a reasoning machine, solely intent on manufacturing enjoyment by logical processes. The archaic dogmatism of the divine right of kings, the newer but equally severe dogmatism of Rousseau and the framers of the rights of man, were alike swept aside, because they lacked all proof of their utility or reality. But, as generally happens with destroyers of dogma, Bentham cleared the way for a new and formidable dogmatism, when he insisted on the undisputed sway of the principle of utility in politics. Imbued with the very one-sided and almost self-cancelling theory that man was a reasoning creature engaged in a constant pursuit after happiness, Bentham arraigned the institutions of his country at the utilitarian judgment bar. Monarchy was condemned, the king being sentenced as the "corrupter general" of society. Aristocracy fared no better. Democracy, however, was pronounced to be the sole form of rational government, because as each man sought his own happiness, the government of the majority would necessarily pursue the interests and the happiness of that majority. Bentham's contempt of history (which is in essence the record of man's experience in his civic relations) here led him into an unwarrantable assumption. Omitting all consideration of the morality, or immorality, of the claim, it does not follow that the collective action of great masses of men will lead to results similar to those gained by individuals. Still more egregious is his blunder in assuming that what the majority aim at, that they will realize.

[1] "To know the true good of the community is what constitutes the science of legislation; the art consists in finding the means to realize that good" (Bentham, *Principles of Legislation*, ch. 1).

We must remember, however, that while Bentham's contention for an unlimited democracy is logically unsatisfactory, even on his own premisses, yet his scathing criticism of absurd laws and odious sinecures was productive of immediate and also of far-reaching benefit.[1] It nerved with enthusiasm an eager band of disciples, dubbed Benthamites by the public, to attempt a crusade in and out of Parliament against the abuses of the Georgian *régime*. Joseph Hume, the father of the movement for retrenchment and reform, was reinforced in his hitherto almost single-handed struggle against official corruption; and a brilliant group of men, among whom were James Mill, and his yet more gifted son, John Stuart Mill, along with Fonblanque, Buller, and others, resolved to start a distinctively Radical review in which to assert utilitarian principles. The result was the famous *Westminster Review*. Its first number, which appeared in April, 1824, contained an incisive attack on the Whigs from the pen of the elder Mill. Beginning with a survey of the British constitution, he showed its thoroughly aristocratic character, seeing that a few hundred families could return a majority of the House of Commons. He then exhibited the tendency of an aristocracy to divide into two factions; whence it would naturally result that if one party became securely installed in power, the other (the Whigs) would endeavour to oust them by invoking the aid of public opinion, "without any essential sacrifice of aristocratical predominance". This and this alone was the meaning of the occasional coquettings of the Whigs with popular principles, as also of their chief literary organ, the *Edinburgh Review*, in its skilful "see-saw" policy on public affairs. The article is noteworthy

[1] Especially in strengthening the demand for legal reform. "Bentham found the philosophy of law what English practising lawyers had made it, a mess." . . . "Glory be to Bentham that he has been the Hercules of this hydra" (J. S. Mill's *Essay on Bentham*). See also Sir F. Pollock's *History of the Science of Politics*, p. 102.

as the literary *début* of that new philosophic Radicalism, which was to play an important part in the formation of public opinion. So pronounced, indeed, was the intellectual movement towards democratic reform that the younger Mill, in endeavouring to found a select political debating society, found his chief difficulty to lie in the dearth of defenders of existing institutions.

Events also seemed to be moving quickly even in the unreformed Parliament. The repeal, in 1824–1825, of the old statutes prohibiting combinations of workmen enabled our artisans to form trade-unions, thereby checking, at least in some industries, that fall in wages which economists declared to be inevitable; besides which, the power of combination for trade purposes was to have no slight influence in the formation of political clubs. The abolition of religious disabilities, under which Protestant Dissenters and Roman Catholics had long suffered, were two noteworthy concessions to the principle of religious liberty in the years 1828 and 1829 respectively.

But far more important was the earthquake shock of the French Revolution of July, 1830, which dethroned the unteachable Charles X. and destroyed the old legitimist claims of monarchical divine right. The results of this startling event were felt far beyond the bounds of France. The apparently complete triumph of democracy in Belgium, and the popular risings which ensued in Germany, Italy, and Poland, seemed to betoken a speedy end of the old order of things. In few lands did the old and the new stand in more glaring contrast than in the United Kingdom. On the one hand was a government venerable with the prestige of ages, yet having little vital connection with the people whose interests it professed to serve. The ancient glory of the monarchy was now tarnished by the vulgar extravagance and cynical immorality of "the first gentleman in

Europe". With vice and selfishness enthroned, the tone of fashionable society and of our public life may readily be imagined. Thanks to the persistent labours of Joseph Hume and a few other champions of economy, some of the worst financial abuses had been probed and the most shameless sinecures had been abolished; but the game of politics was still the most interesting and profitable of occupations, at least for the victors. A whole generation spent in opposition had sufficed to convert the bulk of the Whig party to the cause of reform, for which, when in power, they had done so little in the previous century.

Certainly they could now make out a good case against the existing parliamentary system. By a strange clinging to old customs, so characteristic of our race, the old system of election and representation, which for Plantagenet England was truly democratic, had undergone scarcely any change during more than two centuries. The policy of the United Kingdom was largely controlled by decayed boroughs or mere hamlets, which were the political property of neighbouring magnates. Out of the 658 members of the House of Commons, as many as 424 were returned either on the nomination or the recommendation of patrons; and it was notorious that £5000 was the average price paid by an aspirant for political honours to the "borough-monger", the bargain being often rounded off by the proviso that the member should pay £1000 for every year which he passed in the parliamentary preserves. The inequalities of the representation and of the franchise were equally grotesque. Scotland returned forty-five members to Parliament, and Cornwall returned forty-four; but this inequality in individual voting power was not so great as would appear on the surface, for in the whole of Scotland there were less than five thousand voters. In the parliamentary boroughs of Great Britain the fran-

chise presented the strangest irregularities. In some towns the mayor and corporation, in others the freemen, returned the members to Parliament; while elsewhere the right of voting was enjoyed by all who inhabited tenements possessing a fireplace. Well might Heine declare in 1830 that England was congealed in a mediæval condition. But under the ice-bound surface of law and custom there was rising a vernal flood-tide which threatened a veritable *débacle*. The forces of nature revealed by the great inventors, Hargreaves, Crompton, Watt, and Stephenson, were working every year with greater potency. A new England, grimy, amorphous, but gifted with the irresistible expansiveness of a vigorous life, was now beginning to burst the crust of the old England. This new energy had no outlet in Parliament; it was scarcely recognized in the statute-book, but it was now to assert its powers.

The contest between the squirearchy and the industrial interest renewed in a nineteenth-century guise the struggle ever going on in a progressive society between the privileged and the non-privileged classes; but rarely have the omens threatened civil disturbance more than in the England of 1830. Burdened by an extravagant court, a heedless Parliament, a crushing load of debt, its social system warped and strained by an industrial revolution quite unparalleled in the annals of mankind, the United Kingdom seemed beset with difficulties. The onward rush of political ideas was at least as threatening in pre-reform England as it had been in pre-revolutionary France; and yet, though steam was being rapidly generated in the out-worn governmental machine, many of the engineers seemed to see safety only in stopping the safety-valve.

A fortunate concurrence of circumstances saved us from an explosion. George IV. conferred his only benefit on this world by leaving it shortly before the

French Revolution of 1830; and the elections to a new Parliament, held amid the excitement caused by that event, sent up a majority of reformers to Westminster, thus compelling the old system to pronounce its own doom, and installing a Whig ministry under Earl Grey, in place of that of the Duke of Wellington. The accession of the popular sailor king, William IV., who was in favour of reform, further served to rally the people around our old institutions and avert a catastrophe. A measure was now drawn up by the cabinet, which proposed to give votes to all tenants of a £20 rental, but on the protest of Lord Brougham, backed up by a mass meeting of the men of Newcastle, the limit was extended to "ten-pounders". Another change was less satisfactory. Lord Durham ardently desired to include in the Reform Bill a proposal for voting by ballot, but this was ruled out at the express wish of the prime-minister. Yet, although the Reform Bill came far short of the desires of thorough-going democrats, it elicited from so ardent a reformer as Joseph Hume the statement that he was surprised and gratified by its proposals.

Instead of telling the oft-told tale of the parliamentary struggle for the Reform Bills of 1831 and 1832, it will be more profitable and interesting to examine the artisan movements of the time which prevented the famous Act of 1832 from enjoying that finality which its champions claimed for it.

Judging from the Whig historians and biographers, one would draw the conclusion that the masses of the people were completely unanimous in their support of the Bill. Nothing could be more misleading. The reformers, far from marching in a compact phalanx against the oligarchical stronghold, formed two separate columns of attack, one marching with all the pomp and pageantry of war, the other ill-organized, leaderless, preceded by no martial music, and mute, save for the

defiant shouts which betokened its ardour. Even amidst the assault, these allied forces viewed each other with something of the dislike which exists between regulars and guerrillas; and after the banner of reform was planted on the walls of Old Sarum, the disputes which had been occasionally heard amid all the din of battle, burst forth with ever-increasing animosity. The course of the reform struggle of 1831–1832 is of importance, not only owing to the extension of the franchise which immediately resulted, but also because it led the irregulars to organize themselves, and draw up a programme, which, as will be seen, contained nearly all the watchwords of the Chartists.

The progress of this Radical vanguard has nowhere been so well described as in the manuscript notes on *Working Men's Associations*, left by Mr. Francis Place as materials to serve the historian of this period. In these notes there is a mine of information as to the early history of the Radical and Chartist movement; and their value is enhanced by the usually calm and unbiassed judgment of the writer. Francis Place was by trade a master tailor, who had built up a good business at Charing Cross; but his ambition was not limited to his shop and his bank account. In the words of the old Hebrew Scriptures, which attribute the characteristics of certain callings to famous founders, we might say that Place was the father of latter-day radical tailors. His shop was a veritable Cave of Adullam, a resort for all the disaffected who conspired to change the laws at Westminster; and such was his organizing power and quiet tenacity of purpose, that in 1824 he won a great social and political triumph in skilfully preparing the way for the abolition of the odious Combination Law of 1797, which had crushed any trade-union of working-men. His long investigation of the evil effects of state interference had made him a sturdy upholder of individual

liberty of the *laisser faire* type, and a decided opponent of Robert Owen's State Socialism. He was therefore well fitted to criticise the schemes of the Owenites, who had so much to do with the drafting of the Charter; and the thousands of neatly written pages of his Journal, which is now in the British Museum, attest alike his tailor-like neatness, his unimaginative dulness, and his determination to be not only the chronicler but the organizer of democratic movements. Occasionally the suppressed fire of his resentment flashes forth, as in the statement that the government of the country was "a perpetual cheat, a fraudulent game at fictitious honours and real emoluments, a continual practice of pompous meanness founded on the absurd reverence the people have long been taught to pay to the aristocracy". But such outbursts rarely relieve the monotony of his painfully precise narrative. Much as he hated the abuses of the old oligarchy, he also saw the danger of events moving too fast, and giving power to those who desired to wipe out the national debt and effect a forcible redistribution of wealth. He trembled to see the feebleness of the old order, and the scrambles for place of two effete factions, eyed with growing malignity by the democratic Caliban. The dangers of the time nerved him to struggle for an advanced measure of reform which should purify and strengthen the government, and gain time for the instruction of the masses in the fit use of the political power for which they were clamouring. His apprehensions were shared by many even of the advanced Radicals, who had good reason to know how the leaven of communism was permeating our working-classes, owing to the alluring teachings of Robert Owen and Lieutenant Hodgkin.

As Robert Owen may justly be regarded as the founder of English Socialism, Co-operation, and indirectly of Chartism, a brief sketch of his views will not be out of

place here. The strange chances which raised him from the position of draper's apprentice to that of a partner in a flourishing firm of Manchester manufacturers, and in 1800 installed him as chief partner at the New Lanark Mills, imprinted on his quietly tenacious nature the belief that external circumstances decided not only a man's career, but also his whole character and conduct. Fortunately for his work-people, this usually noxious creed was transformed by the sunshine of his beneficent nature into a source of life-giving activity and persistent endeavour to mould his "hands" at New Lanark until they should become "fully formed men and women". Spacious dining and lecture halls attested his care for their physical and mental welfare. His sale of provisions to them at nearly cost price, and distribution of the profits of this store, marked him out as the father of Co-operation in our land; and his profit-sharing arrangements gained him the same honour in regard to "industrial partnership". But his plans embraced not only the present welfare of his operatives, but also the perfecting of the human race, by means of enlightened education and equalization of opportunities. By beginning with the young, even with the very infants, he so far succeeded with the tough Scottish nature that he claimed for his theories a universal application, and proposed to regenerate the human race by mapping out the earth in quadrangular communities, where, as some wag said, everything was to be common except common sense. Mankind, in fact, was to be born again in an ever-expanding series of industrial parallelograms, where wealth and poverty, religion and family life, were ultimately to give place to the customs of an idealized rabbit warren. Such was the prospect set forth in mild, yet inflexible language by the prophet of New Lanark. It is not surprising that amidst the deepening distress which followed after Waterloo the more ardent of our operatives imbibed

these ideas with an enthusiasm which was not quickly damped either by the dimness of the seer's vision into the future, or by his rigorous autocracy in the arrangement of details. Owen's visit to the United States gave the more restively practical of his disciples the opportunity of starting co-operative societies on what they thought to be workable lines, only to meet with a chilling rebuke on the prophet's return. Dissensions hindered the growth of the regenerating parallelograms as well as of these early co-operative societies; but on the collapse of the parent society the remaining members started *The National Union of the Working-classes* (April, 1831), in order to gain the political enfranchisement which seemed to present the readiest means for securing a redistribution of wealth and equality of opportunity. The formation of this union was the chief political result of the movement initiated by Owen. It was the work of his followers, not of the seer himself; for he ever regarded the new Radicalism with the suspicion and dislike natural to his autocratic character.

But there was another writer whose influence was, for a time, scarcely second to that of Owen, namely, Lieutenant Hodgkin. He seems to have injured his prospects in the navy by a pamphlet on the injustice and iniquity of the press-gang system. While vegetating on the half-pay list, he published another pamphlet, which still more clearly marked him out as a dangerous man. This work, entitled *Labour Defended against the Claims of Capital* (1825), claimed to prove that labour was the sole source of wealth, that only producers had any right to a share of the world's wealth, and that in a society thus reconstructed all law must be abolished, as not only useless but harmful. These theories (which curiously foreshadow those of Proudhon and Bakunin) were set forth in small twopenny reprints and formed the chief stock-in-trade of the "unstamped" press of that date.

The following lines, composed by "one of the know-nothings", show the working of the popular consciousness on the wage-fund theories of Hodgkin and Ricardo:—

> "'Wages should form the price of goods'.
> Yes! Wages should be all:
> Then we who work to make the goods
> Should justly *have them all.*
> But if their price be made of rent,
> Tithes, taxes, profits all,
> Then we who work to make the goods
> 'Should have—just none at all'."

A study of the inner workings of the people's mind at that period will serve to elucidate many questions which are otherwise difficult to understand. For instance, the extraordinary enthusiasm on behalf of the Reform Bill is hard to account for on the ground merely of a desire for electoral purity; but it becomes intelligible in the light of Mr. Place's assertion, that the bulk of the operatives believed the Bill destined to prepare the way for a redistribution of property. Viewed in this light, the Bristol and Nottingham riots might well cause frantic alarm to the propertied classes, which regarded the wanton destruction there perpetrated as merely a foretaste of mob-rule. Hence also, we may add, the dislike with which even the new reformed government regarded co-operative societies, workmen's political associations, and a cheap press, as alike designed to subvert the framework of society.

It must be admitted that the action of several of the new Radical clubs seemed to justify those fears. The Leeds Radical Union, in Feb. 1832, alarmed the moneyed classes by a declaration that the men who as yet had no votes were not responsible for the national debt, which was the work only of the Whig and Tory factions. Even more ominous was a proposal put forth by a ranting coffee-house keeper of the Strand, named Ben-

bow, that the working-classes should strike work for a whole month—a Sacred Month dedicated to the claims of labour. In a pamphlet published by him in Jan. 1832 he hashed up the arguments of Hodgkin, and proceeded to the practical application that the people ought to seize and divide all property, in case the present owners should not be sufficiently impressed by the Sacred Month to consent to its peaceful redistribution. The pamphlet was embellished by the quotation of many texts of Scripture in justification of this step—"The cattle upon a thousand hills are mine" being cited as proof that all oxen might be appropriated by the needy. Eager hopes and fears were aroused by the pamphlet—some operatives believing that the Sacred Month began when the pamphlet appeared.

Amidst all this balderdash we can discern some demands of a more practical nature. The Radicals of Leeds demanded the repeal of all taxes pressing on the working-classes. The *National Union of the Working-classes* declared that indirect taxation (*i.e.* taxation on the materials or processes of industry as well as on articles of consumption) was a means of upholding monopoly and corruption, and ought to be abolished; whereas graduated taxes on property would compel the rich to refund some of the wealth which their laws had extracted from the poor; that taxation and parliamentary representation ought to be coextensive; and that those who were excluded from the franchise ought to be free from taxation, and from service in the militia.

It was clear, however, that these changes could never be brought about until Parliament represented the will of the people of England far more completely than was contemplated in the Whig Reform Bills. Radicals, accordingly, insisted on a drastic reform of the House of Commons, and sought to press on the political clubs to more daring demands than their founders had ever

formulated. Associations like the Birmingham Political Union had already been framed to support the Whigs against the borough-mongers, and carry Lord John Russell's Reform Bill. But there was some danger of these local clubs and unions falling into the hands of faddists and losing all unity of aim. This was especially the case with the Birmingham Political Union, a powerful association which threatened to march 100,000 Midlanders to London to find out why the Reform Bill did not become law. While it was a question of intimidating the Duke of Wellington, the reformers of Birmingham presented a united front; but those who looked beneath the surface saw that the Birmingham leaders were not democrats, but fussy faddists. Chief among them was Thomas Attwood, soon to become known as the first member for Birmingham, and a currency bore of the first magnitude. Attwood was no democrat, and would have induced his union to aim at a £20 limit to the franchise, had not the men of Newcastle and the north declared for the £10 franchise. He valued the Reform Bill chiefly because it gave Birmingham a voice in the nation's councils, and because a little later it sent him to Westminster as one of the two representatives of the Midland capital. This was his long-sought opportunity for striving to re-establish the waning credit of the land, on the basis of an unlimited supply of paper notes.[1] As the men of Birmingham seemed inclined to follow Attwood in his currency craze, while other towns straggled after other local will-o'-the-wisps, some central body was evidently needed to repress provincial fads and bring reformers into line. Place and other Londoners accordingly started (October, 1831) a central club, The National Political Union, to give cohesion to the provincial bodies, and unite the middle and labouring classes in common

[1] On this scheme Place remarked, with unusual humour, that it was understood by very few, and was condemned by all who did understand it.

political action. The history of this union was to prove how difficult it is to bring Britons into line, and how impossible to keep them in line. The older reformers, like Sir Francis Burdett, member for Westminster, speedily took offence at the demand of this union for a "full, free, and effectual representation of the people in the House of Commons", and for the abolition of all "taxes upon knowledge".

But this programme, far from satisfying all Radicals, far from uniting the middle and working classes in a common aim, was disdainfully flung aside by men who claimed to represent the feelings of the artisans and operatives. As has been already noticed, the disappointed followers of Owen had founded, in April, 1831, a National Union of the Working-classes to prepare, *by political action*, for that social regeneration which seemed ever to be receding further into the hazy background of the seer's visions. It was in vain that Owen discountenanced political agitation such as his followers now essayed. He had aroused hopes which he could not satisfy, a spirit which he could not control. The ferment caused by the Lords' rejection of the First Reform Bill (Oct., 1831) now seemed to the more practical of his followers to promise a speedy overthrow of the old system of society, and with a fervour begotten of their communistic beliefs they sought to drive on the National Political Union to advanced democratic demands. These light skirmishers of the Chartist vanguard had begun to disseminate their views in a large hall called the Rotunda, near the Surrey end of Blackfriars Bridge, whence they were known first as the Rotundists, or Rotundanists, according to the speaker's ideas of word-building. There it was that the most important of the "points" of the People's Charter were first popularized. The first sketch of that famous programme, as a fighting creed, is observable in a circular or hand-bill inviting the working-

men of London to a great meeting on Nov. 7, 1831, in front of White Conduit House. After quoting as mottoes the dicta "Labour is the source of wealth", and "That commonwealth is the best ordered where the citizens are neither too rich nor too poor", the circular proceeds to a declaration of rights, which is partly inspired by the Rights of Man of the French revolutionists of 1789: "(1) All property, honestly acquired, is to be sacred and inviolable. (2) All men are born equally free, and have certain natural inherent and inalienable rights. (3) All governments ought to be founded on those rights, and all laws instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of *all* the people, and not for the particular emolument or advantage of any single man, family, or set of men. (4) All hereditary distinctions of birth are unnatural, and are opposed to the *Equal Rights of Man*, and therefore ought to be abolished. (5) Every man of the age of 21 years, who is of sound mind and is not tainted by crime, has a Right, either by himself or by his representative, to a free voice in determining the necessity of public contributions, their appropriation, amount, mode of assessment, and duration. (6) In order to secure the unbiassed choice of proper persons for representatives, the mode of voting should be by ballot; intellectual fitness and moral worth, *and not property*, should be the qualification for representatives; and the duration of Parliaments should be but for *one year*."

It would be tedious to narrate all the disputes between the National Union of the Working-classes and the other union which claimed to combine the aims of the middle and artisan classes in furthering the Whig Reform Bill. Against Lord John Russell's Bill of 1831, and against the slightly amended measure finally passed in June, 1832, Benthamite Radicals and working-men democrats alike protested, the latter declaring that no bill would satisfy them which did not grant universal

suffrage, vote by ballot, annual Parliaments, and abolition of the property qualification for members of Parliament. This programme received the adhesion of the Radical clubs of Leeds, Huddersfield, Manchester, Bristol and Brighton, though the men of Sussex showed their good sense in substituting "short Parliaments" for "Parliaments annually elected".[1]

Sufficient proof has now been adduced as to the width of the gulf separating working-men Radicals and the Whigs in 1831–1832. Great, indeed, was the disgust of the people when it was found that that child of many hopes, the Act of 1832, still excluded from the franchise those townsfolk who could not pay an annual rental of £10, and all save the wealthier leaseholders and copyholders in rural districts. The redistribution of seats was equally unsatisfactory, Lord John Russell himself subsequently admitting that it had been so manipulated as to yield a permanent majority for the agricultural interest.

Yet, however keen was the disgust of the more ardent democrats with a measure which admitted to the franchise less than half a million of men,—that is, less than one-fourth of the number enfranchised by the Act of 1884,—the momentous issues of the Act of 1832 were realized by all keen-sighted observers. They saw that the victory of the reformers upset that balance of power between the three estates of the realm, which had been extolled by Montesquieu as the peculiar virtue of the English constitution. After two centuries of equipoise, the balance was now tilted decidedly in favour of the people's House. The majority of Commoners ceased to be nominees of the aristocracy, and became representatives of the middle

[1] It may be noted here that the demand for equal electoral districts was formulated later, and soon disappeared from the Chartist programme; while that for the payment of members of Parliament originated in the Birmingham Political Union, or rather, was revived by them from Cartwright's programme of 1780.

classes; and when the representative system was admitted to form the basis of the House of Commons, it was inevitable that further changes should follow the course of the new industrial developments of our land. Further than this, the means of effecting such changes had been discovered. The *arcana* of state-craft had been divulged, never again to be concealed under the trappings of an almost mediæval past. The coercion applied by the masses of the people to the wavering monarch had induced him to warn the recalcitrant Lords that unless they passed the bill, their opposition would be swamped by a wholesale nomination of new peers. The surrender of the Upper House revealed the hitherto secret machinery of our constitutional life, and proved how irresistible was the pressure of the popular demand both on the monarchy and the aristocracy. The prerogative of the crown was thenceforth a lever which could be wielded for the overthrow of aristocratic power; and the House which could set that force to work was naturally supreme in the state. Since 1832 the efforts of democrats have accordingly been directed, not against the monarch or the Lords, but to the acquisition of completer control over the House of Commons. This is a fact of the utmost importance, as it marks off English Radicalism from the cognate democratic movements on the Continent, which, unable to effect a lodgment in existing institutions, have generally striven to overturn them. They have been revolutionary: our Radicalism has in the main been evolutionary.

It is a profound remark of the Roman historian, Tacitus, that the obedience of a people may be gravely suspected when they prefer to interpret rather than to follow the commands of their rulers. What would he have said to a state of things where the ruler has to interpret the wishes of his people? Yet that has been the anomalous position of the crown since 1832. The importance of

the change has been obscured partly by our innate respect for constitutional forms, partly by the surprising adaptability of our rulers and our parties to new conditions. Subsequently I shall have to dilate on these features of our political life which tend to peace and stability. Here I may merely note that the results of the Reform Bill of 1832 were discounted by the personal ascendency of Earl Grey, and of Lords Melbourne and Palmerston, in the ranks of the reformers; so that not until the death of the last, in 1865, did the full consequences of the measure develop themselves. On the other hand, the beaten Tory party, under the able lead of Sir Robert Peel, began to reorganize itself with a view to the new requirements of the age, and speedily emerged from obscurity with renewed vigour and vitality. These and other causes conspired to postpone the triumph of Radical agitation for well-nigh forty years.

An assertion has therefore found favour that the Act of 1832 was conservative rather than progressive, that it closed an old epoch rather than inaugurated a new one. Certainly, in the restoration of the franchise to something like its old character, and in the averting of civil war or revolution, the measure may in the best sense be called conservative; and if this elastic term may also be used to denote a series of changes which have ultimately led to the transfer of almost complete power to the middle and working classes, then the same appellation may be justified. But, on the other hand, the reform struggle of 1831–1832 was to prove a stimulus to democratic agitation by revealing the predominance of the Commons over the other two estates of the realm, and by showing how that power could be increased. Bacon remarks that a government is wise when it handles things in such a way as to leave to the discontented "some outlet of hope". That was the condition of things in the early part of the Victorian era. Amidst

all the distress of those years, the hope of gaining a fuller control over the People's House was the pole-star of the moral-force Chartists and their sympathizers, guiding them in the channel of constitutional agitation, and away from the rocks and shoals of forceful intrigue.

In its immediate effects, then, the great Reform Act of 1832 may be called conservative; while its wider and ultimate result was to further the progress of democracy by characteristically English methods. It is the chief glory of our race that, while stiff and unyielding as individuals, it is in the mass surprisingly adaptable to new political circumstances. In the majestic cycle of growth from Alfred the Great to Victoria, no episode illustrates more clearly than the struggle for reform our deeply-rooted instinct to cling to the old and adapt it to new conditions as they arise. It is this which has imparted to the English constitution its unique powers of juvenescence, and has dowered the Victorian era with its faculty of many-sided yet peaceful expansion.

Chapter III.

The Revolt against the New Poor-law.

With the general policy of the reformed Parliament we have here no concern, not even for its noble generosity in according £20,000,000 to colonial planters as the price of their slaves' emancipation. Our task is rather to trace the growth of popular feeling on questions which the Whig ministry failed satisfactorily to solve, and to watch the dissolution of the temporary and artificial alliance between Whigs and Radicals which carried the Act of 1832.

That measure installed the middle classes in power;

and the artisan class waited to see how that power would be used. A collision of interests soon became inevitable amidst the problems produced by the industrial changes of the time. The questions most closely affecting the wage-earners were the organization of trade-unions to resist frequent reductions of wages, and the protection by legal recognition and control of the co-operative societies which the more practical followers of Robert Owen had endeavoured to conduct. On both these topics the attitude of the Whig ministry was disappointingly passive, if not actually hostile. Ministers could not oppose the formation of numerous trade-unions, seeing that in 1825 the old laws forbidding their formation had been repealed. Still, they and their supporters viewed with apprehension the organization of the working-classes, which were deeply imbued with the levelling theories of Owen and Hodgkin; and when, after nearly all industries had been organized, trade-unionism began to spread among agricultural labourers, the authorities took alarm. There were certainly some grounds for apprehension. In and after the year 1829 many bands of peasants had marched from village to village under the orders of an imaginary leader called "Swing", burning ricks, smashing the hated machinery, and threatening agriculture with ruin. After a temporary abatement of this violence, it now seemed to be about to revive in an organized form by the formation of a Grand National Union, which urged agricultural labourers not to work for less than ten shillings a week. As this pittance was rarely obtained by the labourers of Dorset, some earnest men of Tolpuddle, near Dorchester, formed a "grand lodge" in their village, and ordered of the village painter a figure of Death of heroic stature in order duly to impress the future members. Scared by this portent, the farmers set the law in motion, with the result that the magistrates, and finally the judge, under

an antiquated statute, convicted the leaders of enrolling men by oath. For this offence, in spite of their admitted good character, they were sentenced to seven years' transportation (1834); and were only tardily rescued from Botany Bay by the indignant protests of vast meetings of their countrymen. Little more need be said on the subject of trade-unionism here, except that it was a powerful feeder of political discontent, and was soon to show its power amidst the strikes of 1842.

The Whig ministry was equally unfriendly to the growth of the co-operative movement, believing, and not unreasonably, that under the guise of co-operation the Owenites were desirous of furthering their communistic schemes. All that the more practical followers of the New Lanark seer really desired was legal protection for the new co-operative societies against the designs of fraudulent officers, whose flight with all the available cash brought many a store to collapse and thousands of families to beggary. Up to the year 1846 neither co-operative nor benefit societies received any recognition at law, much less any supervision such as would diminish the risks of fraud. Not till that year was any measure passed by Parliament on the subject. The feeling of government towards the early co-operators was one of suspicion and dislike, which they repaid with interest.

In all probability, however, Radicals would have found no general support, and the People's Charter would never have been drawn up, but for the blaze of discontent caused by the exorbitant stamp duty on newspapers and by the severity of the new Poor-law of 1834. This law was passed at a time when the collapse of the federated trade-unions and of many co-operative societies revealed the impotence of the wage-earners for sustained and well-organized action. Old questions and

old agitators were passing away.[1] The agitation for factory reform, championed by Lord Ashley (afterwards Lord Shaftesbury) and Mr. Fielden, member for Oldham, had already brought industrial and social questions to the fore; and now the drastic Poor-law of 1834 concentrated the attention of prince and peasant, rate-payer and pauper, on the pressing problem of poor-relief. It was a sign of the times when the veteran agitator Cobbett, and the foppish "Tory-Radical", Benjamin Disraeli, joined hands to oppose the passing of the Whig measure of 1834.

The evils of our older system of relief of the poor, with which the reform ministry had to grapple, certainly called for energetic action. Some of them may be traced back to the famous law of Queen Elizabeth, which first strove to alleviate the distress caused by the many social changes of the Tudor period. That measure charged the authorities of each parish to maintain their own destitute persons; but the merely parochial character of the system early produced diversities in the management which made it necessary to fence off the poor of one parish from the poor of another parish. Various Acts of Settlement were passed, which rendered it increasingly difficult for a rural labourer to gain a legal settlement in any but his native parish. Indeed Adam Smith, the author of the immortal work *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), satirically remarked that the English peasant had to stay where he was born and bred, lest he might perchance become a burden to the poor-rates of some other parish. A few efforts were made to remedy the harshness of the Law of Settle-

[1] The rancorous diatribes of the older agitators, Hunt and Cobbett, against all men in authority and against one another, were losing them their earlier influence with the masses; and Hunt received notice from his constituents at Preston that they would not again require his services in Parliament. Hunt and Cobbett were both in the last year of their feverish existence.

ment; but they had little effect; and our villages remained almost as isolated as in the middle ages.

Customs so cramping to the life of our rural poor naturally subjected them to a terrible strain during times of scarcity, such as those of the long war with France. The system practically broke down; but the parochial authorities, instead of demanding the abolition of the Law of Settlement, so that their surplus poor might go away freely to the new factory towns where work was to be had, took the unwise step of doling out relief from the rates in proportion to the price of bread and to the number of children in the family relieved. This practice, for which we are indebted to the sagacity of the magistrates of Speenhamland in Berkshire, was adopted by hundreds of parishes which saw no other way out of present difficulties. The natural results speedily followed: habits of prudence, foresight, and self-restraint were at a discount; and a labouring man, waxing fat and flourishing according to the number of children clustering thick about him, could repeat with gusto the benediction of the Psalmist on the man who had his quiver full of them. Rate-payers, however, were increasingly inclined to doubt the applicability of the blessing to an over-populated island, and gave willing ear to the protests of the Rev. Dr. Malthus against methods of poor-relief which threatened to deluge us with a generation of bounty-bred and bounty-fed paupers. Fortunately, the customs first adopted in 1796 did not spread to most of the parishes of the north and the far west—a fact which probably accounts for the greater independence of the working-classes in those parts; but even there the prospects of weekly doles from the parish were beginning to lead to acts of intimidation with a view to compelling magistrates to adopt the customs of the south. In the southern and south-midland districts nearly every rural parish had adopted the system, with

the result that the village poorhouse was crowded with demoralized creatures, who lived lavishly at the expense of their more independent neighbours. Farmers often turned off their labourers, and took them on at two-thirds of their former wages, knowing that the parish would make up the wages to the total amount required by the price of corn and the size of the several families. To rate-payers who could not adopt similar dodges the system spelt ruin, unless they too went on the parish—a process adopted in one village of Buckinghamshire with such gratifying success that every parishioner except the parson became a pauper. The system was twice cursed: it cursed those who paid rates by impoverishing them; it cursed those who received by debasing them.

The experience of practical men and the ideas of political economists alike condemned these insensate customs. Indeed, the activity in economic thought aroused by the *Essay on Population* of the Rev. Dr. Malthus, may be considered as largely resulting from the problem of pauperism, which that amiable clergyman endeavoured to explain and solve. All the circumstances of the time favoured the supremacy of the principle of *laisser faire*, or non-interference with individual liberty, as the best safeguard of private and public prosperity. The economist Ricardo emphasized the inexorable action of economic law. The futility of state intervention was set forth in many other writings; and no topic afforded so triumphant an illustration of these arguments as the abuses of a poor-law system which was pauperizing well-nigh half the nation. Clever writers like the Rev. Sydney Smith and Miss Martineau demonstrated the need for a complete change, if not the abolition of the Poor-law. But the Tory cabinets of 1815–1830 were paralysed by that timidity which has beset every non-representative government of this century when confronted by wide-spread misery or disaffection. With the Whig government of

1832 the new political economy leaped to power, at least as regards all questions which did not injure the interests of the parliamentary majority, and it was therefore left to the Whig government of the middle classes and *doctrinaire* philosophers to cleanse the Augean stable of pauperism. A commission was appointed in 1833 to report on the evils above-described; and the Poor-law Amendment Act of 1834 embodied nearly all the recommendations of the commission. Its chief provisions may be thus summarized:—(1) The government of the United Kingdom for the first time gained definite and almost complete control of the system of poor-relief, thus reducing parochial customs of relief to comparative uniformity and rendering impossible any intimidation by village ruffians. (2) Instead of each parish managing its own poorhouse, parishes were to be grouped together in a larger district called a union, having one workhouse. Each union workhouse was to be controlled by rate-payers, under supervision from a new governmental body sitting in London, the Poor-law Board.[1] (3) The system of doles from the rates in aid of wages was entirely swept away, by out-door relief being prohibited to all able-bodied persons. (4) The old Law of Settlement was so far modified as to make it easy for a labouring man to migrate in search of work. We may note in passing that labour hereby gained a fluidity unknown in England for fully two centuries. The new railways were soon to aid in the transference of population from congested villages to manufacturing districts, to the great advantage of rural rate-payers, but to the harm of factory artisans, whose wages were severely depressed by the inflowing tide of unskilled labour.

The act passed the Commons almost unanimously, only twenty members following Cobbett in his headlong opposition; and in the view of the rate-payers, the mea-

[1] It now is merged in the Local Government Board.

sure "saved the country". Many of its provisions were indeed most salutary, restoring to the English labourer his earlier habits of thrift and independence; while the freer movement of labourers tended to break up the foul nests of corruption into which our villages had often degenerated.

And yet there was some reason in the opposition which Cobbett, the young Disraeli, and the *Times* newspaper alike offered to the measure. The support vigorously accorded by the cantankerous Lord Brougham sufficed to ensure its unpopularity, especially when he asserted that the mere fact of a man's destitution proved that Nature had no room for him "at her already overcrowded table". Besides, the measure applied almost indiscriminately the same remedy to urban and rural, manufacturing and agricultural districts. It offered the first prominent example of a wholesale application of *laisser-faire* principles to destitute persons whose conditions of life differed in nearly every respect.[1] Moreover, the transition was in most cases made with very little previous notice, and certainly with none of the needful preliminary training in thrift. People who for more than a generation had grown accustomed for the parish to "find them in everything", were suddenly told that they must thenceforth shift for themselves, or go into the new grim workhouses, there to be separated, to don the paupers' garb, and subsist on bread of affliction and water of affliction. The change, after the old liberal rations of meat and beer, was certainly trying. If it was true that under the old system new-comers at the Reading workhouse had been upset by the high living, was it not also true that in every workhouse after 1834, paupers were being worn to the bone by the hard

[1] Still more extraordinary was the application (1838) of the new poor-law to Ireland, where there had been no poor-law at all, and where out-door relief was to be entirely prohibited! The law was extended to Scotland in 1845.

work and meagre fare now administered to them? There is abundant evidence (quite apart from *Oliver Twist*[1]) that the change was so sudden and acute as to provoke the wrath of the honest labouring poor. Fortunately it occurred at a time when wheat was unusually plentiful and cheap, the average price in the years 1834–36 being only 43*s.* the quarter. But when from 1837 years of scarcity followed one another in dreary succession, labourers began to rage against the authors of the poor-law reform who had placed before them the cruel alternative of complete independence or the workhouse. The report of the select parliamentary committee, which inquired into the working of the new law, includes several hostile petitions, those from Lancashire being especially vigorous. The men of Salford and Oldham protested in almost identical terms that, as the poor had indisputable right to a maintenance in exchange for their labour, they were filled with dismay at the introduction of the new law; by which "men have been forcibly and illegally separated from their wives, and both of them from their children, and have been confined in separate cells in large prisons called Union workhouses, clad in prison dresses, and reduced by insufficient coarse food to the confines of starvation". Lancashire had been free from the worst evils of the old system. It was natural, then, that the County Palatine, together with other populous districts of the north, should resent the severities of the new poor-law; and that the bulk of the "testimonials" in its favour should come from the south midland and southern counties which it rescued from impending financial ruin. At all events, the evidence points clearly to the fact that, though the

[1] Dickens possibly borrowed his story of Oliver Twist asking for "more" from a caricaturing song of the period, which described how a boy on asking for more soup was pitched by the master of the workhouse into the copper, there to serve as "stock" for the enrichment of the liquid!

new law was hailed with gratitude by the rate-payers of the south, it moved the indignation of the workers in our great industrial centres. If further evidence is needed as to the hatred caused by the new law, it may be found at Leicester, where, at the general election of 1841, the cry was raised—"Let us end the power of the Whigs. Vote for the Tories in preference to the Whigs, the authors of the accursed Poor-law".

There was some reason in these feelings of resentment. Artisans felt that the Whig government had cheated their sturdiest supporters, the men whose enthusiasm in the cause of parliamentary reform had broken down the close ring of the borough-mongers: it was their voices which had swelled the cry of "The bill, the whole bill, and nothing but the bill": it was their persistent toil which had given to that movement its irresistible momentum, and had placed the Whigs securely in power. And what had been their reward? The first great measure of domestic concern had been this Poor-law Act, which cut down the rates, but by means of poor-law Bastilles and a diet of skilly for the destitute. To the suspicious imaginations of workingmen the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 appeared to be merely another middle-class measure; for had not the reformed House of Commons accepted with little modification the Lords' amendment, and thereby excluded from the elective town-councils all councillors who did not possess a certain amount of real or personal property?

As the legislation of 1833–1837 was wholly in favour of the newly enfranchised middle-classes, would not a genuinely democratic Parliament right the wrongs of the artisans and rural labourers? This was the feeling fermenting in myriads of brains. These were the events which broke up the alliance between Whigs and Radicals, and the schism tended, at least on all industrial

questions, to ally Whigs and Tories in a solid phalanx against change; while very many of the working-men, when left without any cultured leaders, fell under the influence of men who advocated physical force.

If, as will be shown in the next chapter, "moral-force" Chartism was largely the outcome of the agitation for a free press, "physical-force" Chartism gained its strength from the popular hatred against the new poor-law Bastilles,—a hatred fanned almost into a flame of revolt by the rabid rhetoric of Stephens and Oastler in the north.

Chapter IV.

The Fight for a Free Press.

Before proceeding to a description of the Chartist movement, it may be well to diverge from the beaten track of politics to describe a struggle which has had an incalculable influence on modern life. In these days of cheap daily newspapers it seems scarcely credible that up to 1836 the average price of an English journal was sevenpence, and that frugal and law-abiding folk rarely indulged in that costly luxury except on Saturday or Sunday. The high price of papers was caused partly, of course, by the comparatively small numbers who in any one district were able to take an intelligent interest in public affairs. The iron horse had not as yet accelerated the distribution of newspapers. The citizen of Leicester or Oxford never dreamt then of a day when the London daily paper should be on his breakfast-table. The day of the engineer had not yet fully dawned. The hand of the man of law was still heavy on the land, and the popular intelligence slumbered under the pressure

of laws which seemed designed to postpone the awakening to a distant future. The miserable sum of £20,000 was in and after 1833 annually doled out by government in aid of the education which some noble men and women were endeavouring to extend to their benighted countrymen; and this sum was less than a fiftieth part of what our administrators then raised by the "taxes on knowledge".

These odious taxes included the stamp duty of fourpence on every copy of a newspaper, the duty of threepence on every pound of paper, and a heavy impost on advertisements. It would be difficult to say whether these taxes were imposed with the aim of helping the revenue, or, as was claimed by Dr. Birkbeck in 1835, to check the growth of popular intelligence. A good case could be made out for either supposition. On the one hand, it might fairly be urged that these, or similar taxes, were rendered necessary by the refusal of the House of Commons in 1815 to impose any longer on the propertied classes the crushing impost of two shillings in the pound on income, which they had gallantly borne for the last nine years of the war. Hence the government was forced to recur to the system of placing heavy duties on multifarious articles, until the Rev. Sydney Smith could say, with equal wit and truth, that every article was taxed, from the top of the schoolboy to the medicine which ended the old man's days and the marble which recorded his virtues. It was only natural, then, that the newspaper press should speedily be subjected to a stamp duty of fourpence per copy, and that paper and advertisements should also be taxed.

Undoubtedly, however, the growth of ribald and seditious pamphlets amidst the distress and discontent of 1815 strengthened the determination of the government to impose these heavy taxes on knowledge. But, so far from repressing sedition, the increased newspaper

tax proved to be its best feeder. The poor or economical, being unable to afford the ninepenny *Times*, *Morning Chronicle*, or *Herald*, betook themselves to cheap publications like those of Cobbett, which, under the guise of a weekly letter, evaded the duty; and the success of his *Twopenny Register* raised up a number of unstamped papers which indulged in the most violent and scurrilous abuse of the Regent, the Castlereagh ministry, the church, and all the institutions of the land. In order to suppress these seditious and abusive prints, Castlereagh introduced and passed an act for the purpose of stopping their production and sale, with the natural result that the severe penalties imposed exasperated the democrats and increased the number of their pamphlets and prints.

The tax on paper was equally serious, for it rendered difficult, if not impossible, the publication of cheap literature. An example of this is seen in the praiseworthy attempt made by Mr. Charles Knight to spread enlightenment by his *Penny Encyclopædia*. The completion of this truly great and noble work entailed on him a total loss of £32,000, and of this deficit £30,000 was caused by the heavy duty on paper. In one of her tales illustrative of political economy, Miss Martineau stated that there were in the United Kingdom nearly 800 paper-mills, producing paper which was valued at £1,500,000; and the paper-duty amounted to as much as £770,000, or far more than the wages of the 25,000 workmen employed. The means taken by government to prevent any evasion of this tax may be illustrated by an incident which befell William Lovett, whose career will presently be described. After the visit of an old farmer-like gentleman to the co-operative association of which Lovett was secretary, there came a writ from Somerset House charging him with defrauding the revenue. After long search and laborious inquiry at the

official "circumlocution office", the offence was found to consist in the co-operative quarterly report, which contained one quarter of a printer's sheet of paper on which the duty of one shilling had not been paid—a fact noticed by the government spy, who had come in the guise of a friend from the country desirous of spreading the blessings of co-operation in his native village.

When books and pamphlets were subjected to this vexatious impost, and newspapers were rendered a costly luxury, it was natural that all friends of the people should combine in an effort to sweep away all these obnoxious "taxes on knowledge". The benevolent Dr. Birkbeck, whose Institute had lately commenced its grand work of educating the youth of the metropolis, and Mr. Chadwick, the pioneer in so many social reforms, were the first to initiate a public agitation on the subject, in a meeting held at the City of London Scientific and Literary Institution, in April, 1830. The excitement aroused by the revolutions on the Continent and the reform struggle in our own land gave a further impulse to the growth of an "unstamped" press, by which working-men leaders determined, in defiance of the law, to diffuse political information among their own class at a popular price. In this determination lay the germ of the cheap newspaper press of to-day, with its multifarious powers.

At the outset of the struggle, the champions of popular intelligence had no doubts whatever as to the wholly beneficent influence of their new creation. Witness this poem of Ebenezer Elliott, the "Corn Law Rhymer" of Sheffield, in which, after singing of the creation of light, he concludes:—

"And shall the mortal sons of God
Be senseless as the trodden clod
And darker than the tomb?
No, by the mind of man,

By the swart artisan,
By God, our Sire!
Our souls have holy light within,
And every form of grief and sin
Shall see and feel its fire."

. . . . . .

"'The Press', all lands shall sing
The Press, the Press we bring
All lands to bless.
Oh, pallid want, oh, labour stark,
Behold, we bring the second ark!
The Press! The Press! The Press!"

The new faith was speedily to find its champions and martyrs. To the working-men who were to form the backbone of moral-force Chartism, political enfranchisement never seemed an end in itself, but rather a means of gaining opportunities of social, mental, and moral improvement. This was the motive force which impelled men like William Lovett, Henry Vincent, and Hetherington through their varied toils and imprisonments. A brief sketch of these men may not be out of place here; for by them and others of their class movements were initiated which were later on to be patronized, and finally adopted, by responsible statesmen.

William Lovett, the future compiler of the People's Charter, was born in 1800 at the fishing village of Newlyn, in Cornwall, shortly after the death of his father at sea. His boyhood, passed amidst the delights of the sea-shore, the privations caused by the war, and the alarms excited by the press-gang, naturally aroused in his gifted and sensitive being a love of nature and indignation at the wrongs inflicted by man. Necessity soon drove the lad to London, where he arrived with little money and no friend. In his lodgings in Southwark he was alike surprised and disgusted at the filth of the tenements and the rowdy behaviour of the inhabi-

tants. Blackened eyes were especially common on the Monday as a result of the previous days' "sprees", and prize fights not infrequently went on in the streets almost unchecked by the feeble and ill-organized watchmen. Though for a time almost on the verge of starvation, Lovett, by industry and thrift, ultimately raised himself above these degraded surroundings, being helped in his struggles by attendance at the classes of Dr. Birkbeck's Institute. The success of his teachers in imparting technical knowledge, and in awakening the mental and moral faculties, was in Lovett's case so complete that he often dined on bread and cheese that he might add to his scanty store of books.[1] His eager desire for the improvement of his fellows led him to start the movement for opening museums on Sundays, with a petition which set forth the growth of intemperance consequent on the want of rational recreation.

But Lovett's work was to be mainly political. Along with very many self-educated men of those days, he came under the spell of Robert Owen's ideas for the renovation of society, which have been previously described; but the young Cornishman, with all the imaginative qualities of his race, had a keen regard for practical results, to which Owen's schemes could with the utmost difficulty be adapted. When, therefore, the seer was laying down the laws for his new society at New Harmony in the United States, Lovett and some other half-convinced Owenites started co-operative stores, in order to bring the system into touch with the workaday world. He became the secretary of the central co-operative society,

[1] The foundation by Mr. Brougham of "The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge" in 1825, was beginning to place good books and magazines within the reach of many an artisan who previously had had only Cobbett's *Register* or the frequently ribald productions of the "unstamped" press. To counteract these vicious influences the new society issued the *Penny Magazine*, which—as was asserted by the then Lord Brougham in 1834—speedily extinguished the worst of those publications,

called "The British Association for Promoting Co-operative Knowledge"; and not even the failure of this and many other co-operative societies quenched his belief in the future success of this principle, which was to be realized ten years later by the Rochdale Pioneers. Despite the collapse of this association, Lovett, with undaunted energy, organized, in April, 1831, the National Union of the Working-classes, which vainly strove to carry a truly democratic reform. On the decline of this association, Hetherington and he founded the London Working-men's Association (1836), with the aim of improving the moral and mental position of their fellows, and of gaining further political rights. The repeal of the crushing tax on newspapers occupied their energies at the outset; and no part of Lovett's life was more fruitful in results than the efforts which he and his associates made for popularizing knowledge and political instruction.

Throughout the turmoil of strifes which besmirched many a reputation, Lovett's character and career stood forth firm, manly, and consistent. Nature had not bestowed on him physical force sufficient to stand the strain of an active mind and a nervous temperament when placed amidst sordid and chafing surroundings. But though "soured by the perplexities of life", and weighted by a delicate frame, he never hesitated to stand forth in defence of his principles, defying alike tyrants and demagogues. In 1831 he allowed his furniture to be seized and sold rather than serve in the militia, for which he had been drawn. Eight years later, with equal staunchness he signed a Chartist protest, knowing well that it would lodge him in Warwick jail. As a rule his speeches were distinguished for reasonableness and manly independence; but, when excited by any act of injustice, his usually mild intellectual features were lit up by the fierce fires that burnt

within, and his speech rang with indignation. And yet he never became a firebrand; for, realizing from his early teacher Owen the futility of mere brute force and the more lasting effects of moral suasion, he always sought to convince rather than to coerce; and, risking the loss of popularity, he never shrank from exposing the folly of those physical-force Chartists who were swayed by the gusts of popular applause and passion. If in addition to his many estimable qualities nature had bestowed on him that force of character which dominates men and affairs, the Chartist movement might have gained a speedier and completer success than it was to achieve. As it is, he left behind him the record of a long life unceasingly devoted to the moral and political advancement of his class, and far more influential than that of many of the so-called statesmen of his time.

Henry Vincent was another proof of the justice of Kingsley's remark that the Chartist movement called forth the energies of all our best working-men. The future famous lecturer was born in High Holborn in 1813; but his father soon removed to Hull, where the boy was apprenticed to a printer. The political excitements of 1830 first drew the lad into the whirl of public affairs; and after the return of the family to London young Vincent's oratorical powers gained him increasing popularity with the Radicals who were wont to gather to applaud their favourite speakers in Clerkenwell Green. Like other young democrats of those days, he joined in the work of circulating the cheap unstamped newspapers; and extending his work to the provinces, he became a contributor, and later, an editor, of the unstamped *Western Vindicator*, published at Bath. Vincent's florid writing and his passionate rhetoric were well suited to the ardent west-country temperament. His mobile features, the magic of his voice, and his impassioned perorations, produced an extraordinary

effect, perhaps unequalled since the time when Whitfield's thrilling appeals drew tears to the grimy cheeks of the Gloucestershire miners. Political passion, a century later, now made Vincent's oratory a danger among the excitable miners of Monmouthshire, who, as we shall presently see, marched in thousands to rescue him from the jail at Newport where the fears of the propertied classes had immured him. Vincent's charm of manner and his claim for the complete political equality of the sexes gained him unique popularity with the women of the west, as was seen in a great demonstration in his honour given by them at Hartshill Gardens, Bath, from which every other man was excluded. Apart from its ludicrous aspects, this event is noteworthy as marking the progress of the Women's Rights movement, of which John Stuart Mill was the intellectual champion, and as tending to range the early female emancipators shoulder to shoulder with the champions of the unstamped press and of the Charter. Of Henry Vincent's career subsequent to his imprisonment we need say little more. The editing of his newspaper, platform speaking, election contests, and lectures on historical and moral subjects filled up an energetic and useful life. Long before its close, in 1878, he had the gratification of seeing the last of the "taxes on knowledge" repealed, while most of his political aims had also been realized. Indeed, few men have exercised a more stimulating influence than Vincent on the middle and working classes of his time, first by his political orations, and later by his lectures. Popular lecturing on moral and historical subjects was hardly known until Vincent revealed its potentialities. His power both as a speaker and lecturer lay not in argument, in which he was admittedly very deficient, but rather in the glow of fancy and exuberance of language in which he suffused his subject, and in the dramatic peroration,

which, as I have been assured by one of his numerous admirers, frequently brought a whole audience to its feet.[1]

For the more virile advocacy of a free press we must turn to Henry Hetherington and John Cleave. The former was born in London in 1792, and was brought up to the printing trade. After the war period, becoming imbued with Robert Owen's doctrines, he threw all his energies into the cause of co-operation and democratic reform. Though endowed with less organizing and tactical skill than Lovett, and less rhetorical power than Vincent, Hetherington was a man of greater resource, reasoning ability, and will power. In order to effect the equalization of wealth, he determined to defy Castlereagh's press law and issue unstamped weekly *Penny Papers for the People* (Oct. 1830), changing the title at the end of the year to "*The Poor Man's Guardian*, established contrary to law to try the power of right against might". At the corner where the government stamp should have come, appeared the motto "Knowledge is Power", around a printing-press. In its little space of four pages this prototype of the cheap press in England included scanty scraps of news, two or three advertisements of Radical or freethought pamphlets, and a long article filled with violent abuse of the Whig and Tory factions. Throughout the reform struggle, Hetherington declaimed against the "apostasy and villainy of the Whigs", and against Parliament, which he dubbed the "Westminster tax-trap". Monarchy was "an expensive farce which ought at once to be closed"; the standing army of "man-butchers" ought speedily to be disbanded, and the sponge be applied to the debt "called national". One short and bloody struggle would gain all these boons and end the inequalities of wealth. As respectable booksellers

[1] See also Solly's *These Eighty Years*, vol. i. chap. 12.

shrank from the risk of vending this illegal print, Hetherington gathered a band of volunteers to sell it in the streets or hawk it from house to house. He and his news-agents were speedily subjected to prosecutions and persecutions not unlike those which Marat had had to endure from the Parisian police. Many were the expedients adopted to evade the law. Large parcels of waste paper labelled *Poor Man's Guardian*, were often despatched from Hetherington's front door, and were valiantly defended by the bearers against the police, while the copies of the paper were being smuggled out by a back door or over the roofs. Cleave adopted the device of sham funerals from neighbours' houses, the coffins being filled with his *Police Gazettes*. A "victim fund" was started to pay the fines of printers or salesmen who were convicted, and to lessen the hardships of the five hundred or more persons who suffered imprisonment for their devotion to the cause. Hetherington saw his business melt away under the hostility of wealthier neighbours, who probably were alarmed by the political programme—universal suffrage, vote by ballot, short Parliaments, and no property qualification for members—which he unceasingly advocated. Filled with as fanatical a zeal as the French revolutionists, whom he ever held up to admiration, Hetherington extended his operations into the provinces, his journal gaining a large sale in Lancashire. Three terms of imprisonment failed to shake the firmness of his purpose, or to injure the sale of his paper. In fact, he started similar weekly papers, the *Republican* and the *Destructive*, which were still more revolutionary in their aims; and when, owing to various causes, the sale of his first paper declined, he met the popular demand for more general news and less diatribe by starting his *Twopenny Despatch*. Meanwhile others had followed his example. John Cleave, a printer, who retained the bluff bearing and love of liberty of

his early seafaring days, brought out his celebrated *Police Gazette*, which soon attained an immense circulation, and conducted its editor twice to prison. Carlisle's *Gauntlet*, another Radical and freethought journal, enjoyed a weekly sale of 22,000 copies, or more than four times that of Robert Owen's *Crisis*, which was losing ground. Watson, the editor of *The Working Man's Friend*, and Mr. William Carpenter, editor of *The Political Magazine*, also felt the weight of the government's displeasure. Besides these well-known weekly unstamped papers, a swarm of disreputable prints—some 150 in all, says Francis Place—bore witness to the depth of popular ignorance and of hatred against the government.

But despite all the violence of the unstamped press, public opinion set steadily in favour of the law-breakers, even before the law was stultified by the declaration of a jury that the *Poor Man's Guardian* was not an illegal production. This verdict was largely due to the signal ability with which Hetherington turned the tables on his prosecutors, convicting them of gross injustice in persecuting him while they allowed expensive journals like the *Lancet*, *Literary Gazette*, *Athenæum*, and *Legal Observer* to go scot-free. After the verdict of the jury on June 17, 1834, the fourpenny stamp duty was doomed.

Eminent men like George Grote, the historian, and even one of the Rothschilds, signed a requisition for a public meeting, to be held at the Guildhall, advocating the complete abolition of the taxes on knowledge; and though *The Times* and *The Morning Chronicle* discountenanced the agitation, yet they were speedily silenced by the establishment of an unstamped threepenny daily paper, and secretly urged the Whig ministry to lower the duty to one penny, a figure at which few editors would be likely to brave the risks of prosecution. Unfortunately, their influence prevailed over the almost unanimous voice of public opinion; and though the

chancellor of the exchequer, Mr. Spring Rice, in 1835–36 had a surplus of a million sterling in the nation's budget, yet he clung to the penny duty, claiming that as the nation carried stamped newspapers free of postage, it must make some equivalent charge, and that it would be very hard on country readers to make them pay postage on their papers! The grotesqueness of this excuse is only equalled by its insincerity in days when government, with unruffled equanimity, charged eightpence on a letter from London to Brighton. It was in vain that deputations and petitions poured in to plead for a penny postage for newspapers in place of the detested stamp duty; and there was a general outburst of indignation when it was known that the reduction of the duty to one penny would be accompanied by stringent regulations, aiming at the complete extinction of the unstamped press and pamphlets.

At once the democrats were up in arms, the artisans being especially inflamed against the proposals. For some weeks past an American gentleman, Dr. Black, had been organizing a class of London working-men for correspondence respecting a free press, and now in the midst of the agitation this class widened into the "London Working Men's Association to procure a Cheap and Honest Press". It was known and even admitted by the government that a penny duty and the proposed regulations would raise the price of a lawful journal to fourpence, which was far beyond the means of working-men. Their friends in the House of Commons, including Sir W. Molesworth, and Messrs. Grote, Bulwer Lytton, Hume, and others, made a spirited effort to gain its complete abolition. It was in vain. Mr. Spring Rice, deeply impressed by the fears of the propertied classes, and by the interests of their journals, spent most of his ability in proving the impossibility of carrying on the fourpenny stamp duty, and in demonstrating the improvement

effected in the morals of the unstamped papers as they increased their circulation. The argument proved too much and too little. It failed to calm the fears of the Tories, or to win them from their adhesion to the rival cause of cheap soap; and its timorous inconsequence further widened the schism between Whigs and democrats.

The same half-hearted policy was pursued with regard to the paper-tax, which was reduced to three halfpence per pound. Both changes chiefly benefited the publications read by the middle classes. The *Times*, *Morning Chronicle*, *Standard*, &c., reduced their price to fivepence, while the weekly *Spectator* came down to ninepence. The small cheap newspapers were of course handicapped by the new severe regulations, and by the new duty, which pressed with far greater weight on a small print than on the large and influential newspapers.

For various reasons the free press agitation declined after 1836. Public attention was distracted by the accession of a young and beloved sovereign, by the general enforcement of the new Poor-law, and by other stirring events of the time. But, as will shortly appear, the free-press movement, though making little headway until after 1850, had an important effect on the first development of Chartism.

The second agitation for the complete repeal of all taxes on knowledge will be noticed more fully in the biography of John Bright, which forms part of this series. It may, however, be noted here that the essentially working-man's movement of 1830–36 was in 1850–60 taken up by the middle-class leaders, Messrs. Bright, Cobden, Villiers, Milner Gibson, and Baines. A Press Association was also started, the proprietors and editors of the more expensive journals having seen the folly of their opposition to the abolition of the duty in 1836. The contention for a complete repeal of the duties on news-

papers, paper, and advertisements was, in fact, an extension of the free-trade policy commenced by Peel in 1842, which substituted a tax on property for the vexatious imposts on raw materials and articles of common use.

The repeal of the taxes on knowledge was a foregone conclusion when the beneficial results of the reduction of the newspaper tax were seen in the doubling of the circulation of newspapers within eight years. The improvement in the tone of the press was equally marked, affording gratifying proof of the advance in popular intelligence, which rejected the ribald and seditious trash of the early unstamped prints.[1] Those illegal journals had, however, done a great work in compelling the Whig ministry to advance with the times. Out of the lawless prints there was gradually evolved that marvel of these latter days, a cheap press, which may fitly be called the fourth estate of the realm. If it be true, as surely it is, that democracy can only be successfully worked by well-informed citizens, then no steps can be regarded with more satisfaction than those which have placed the knowledge of public affairs within the reach of the poorest. It was the boast of Pericles that in Athens even the busy man took a lively interest in all the concerns of the city. But the cheap newspaper now puts it in the power of the artisan to follow the events of the day, not only of his own town, but of his country, and of the world at large. What a prospect of mental and civic development is thus opened up, when once the mind of the populace shall be raised above the level of the sordid details which now too often hold it enthralled!

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[1] For fuller details on this subject see my article *The Unstamped Press* in *The English Historical Review* of Oct. 1897.

Chapter V.

Crown, Parliament, and People (1837).

The popular impression as to the Chartist movement would seem to be that it was a sudden and almost causeless outburst of Radical fanaticism; but a study of those years reveals its intimate connection with the movements championed by Major Cartwright, Cobbett, Hunt, Lovett, and Hetherington, and also with the popular indignation aroused by the harsh Whig Poor-law of 1834 and the press regulations of 1836. The concurrent effect of these various causes was to be fully felt in the first years of the present reign, when the new poor-law Bastilles were ready to receive their Oliver Twists, and when even the industrious poor were often forced into them by the dearth of corn and stagnation of trade. Keen-sighted observers had foretold that the new Poor-law would necessitate the repeal of the Corn-laws, and many were the congratulations to the Whig ministry on the bounteous harvests of 1834–1836, which in those years assuaged the hardships consequent on the withdrawal of the weekly dole in aid of wages.

But Fortune, after showering her favours on us, withdrew them as suddenly in the first years of Queen Victoria's reign, and thus revealed the close connection then subsisting between a good harvest and the prosperity of all branches of our manufacturing industry. When bread was dear, so large a share of the income of artisan and shopkeeper went to the landlord, the farmer, and the baker that other trades languished from the decline in the purchasing power of the community. Hence arose those complaints of over-production, which, as Carlyle remarked in his *Chartism*, were inherently absurd when myriad bare backs shivered for lack of

sufficient clothing. Another serious symptom appeared in our social life. At the time when Lancashire and Yorkshire bemoaned the lack of purchasers for their goods, the new facilities for migration offered by the new Poor-law began to burden them with the surplus pauper population, which, unable any longer to loaf out its existence in the parishes of the southern and south-midland counties, tramped towards the fabled wealth of the factory towns. The result may readily be imagined. Our manufacturing districts were crowded with miserable creatures, whose eagerness to take any work at any pay depressed the condition of the regular operatives, and foredoomed strikes to almost certain failure. The position of the new-comers was miserable in the extreme. An observer describes them as generally huddled together in filthy cellars, helpless to make a new start in life, and as strange to the wealthy manufacturers as were the aborigines of Australia.[1] Thus the coincidence of a series of bad harvests with the completion of the new harsh arrangements of the Poor-law gave the last turn to the thumb-screw of misery, and brought England to the verge of a social revolution. Bacon pithily remarks: "If poverty and broken estate in the better sort be joined with want and necessity in the mean people, the danger is imminent and great. For the rebellions of the belly are the worst." That was the state of Great Britain in the first five years of the Victorian era.

And yet, even when beset by extraordinary difficulties at home as well as in India and Canada, our beloved land, so far from succumbing, was about to enter on the most remarkable and glorious period of expansion and growth which any European country has ever experi-

[1] Dr. Cooke Taylor's *Tour in Lancashire*, which states that out of 17,000 destitute persons recently relieved at a refuge in Manchester, only 3500 were natives of the county.

enced. It may not, perhaps, be over-fanciful to trace the action of a compensating principle in our affairs, securing us from continental wars when our domestic affairs threatened a crisis, and breathing new life into our institutions shortly before their subjection to an unwonted strain. The life of Parliament had been renovated by the enfranchisement of the middle classes, so that the terrible social and industrial problems of the new age were confronted, not by a close oligarchy, but by a House of Commons representing the new energy and wealth of the nation. Our old parliamentary system had corrected many of its worst defects, thereby falsifying the confident prophecies of democrats, that nothing could be expected from a Parliament of borough-mongers. Events, therefore, presaged evolution rather than a revolution like that of France in the preceding century. In that unhappy land, after the overthrow of the crumbling walls of privilege, there was neither solidity in her institutions nor solidarity in her classes sufficient to stem the inrushing tide of democratic innovation; and power speedily fell into the hands of enthusiasts, who involved their country in wars that ultimately led her back to despotism.

Ours was a happier lot. Peace, retrenchment, and reform strengthened our institutions when threatened by dangers as great as those of France in 1789; and when industrial and social problems bulked threateningly on the horizon, a new radiance was shed on the nation's life by the accession of a young and beloved princess. The happy results of the decease of George IV. have already been noticed; and his brother, after outliving his earlier popularity, now conferred a similar benefit on mankind by an equally timely departure. The nation hailed with joy the accession of the young Queen Victoria, whose training at Kensington Palace by the fondest and wisest of mothers had seemed to devote her

to a life healthier and purer than that of the court at Windsor under her uncle's *régime*. The curious had long remarked the simple natural life led by the young princess, and opined that her reign might perhaps be as prosperous and glorious as those of the last three English queens who had reigned in their own right over a loyal and devoted people. All the auguries seemed favourable when the young queen—"tears in her eyes, but quite collected"—hastily robed herself in the early morning of June 20, 1837, to accept the allegiance of the archbishop and the lord chancellor. Sentiment deepened into admiration when, in her speech read at the opening of the new Parliament, she declared that she placed unreservedly at its disposal the moneys of the Civil List—a step which the late king had taken only grudgingly and with reservations. Parliament ultimately fixed the Civil List at £385,000, withdrawing from royal control some considerable items.[1] The new accord between crown and Parliament was seen when the claim of the trusty watch-dog Hume for a further reduction in the Civil List was supported by only nineteen members. Two years later, amidst the tumults of the autumn of 1839, a welcome proof of the people's loyalty was seen in the universal acclaim which greeted the news of the queen's approaching marriage with Prince Albert.

These details have a more than personal interest. They distinguish the Radical and Chartist movement from the republicanism which then characterized continental democracy. Frenchmen who strove for a pure and economical administration regarded the sordid rule of Louis Philippe with increasing aversion; every enlightened Prussian chafed under the patriarchal sway of Frederick William IV.; and few Italians who longed

[1] The assumption by Parliament of larger controlling powers over the crown estates, and the fixing of the Civil List, have resulted in a considerable gain to the nation's finance.

for the liberty of their peninsula could regard the Pope or the Bourbons of Naples with the feelings cherished by Englishmen towards Queen Victoria. Radicals might complain of the etiquette which prevented them petitioning the queen, unless they presented themselves in all the glory of court dress at her majesty's *levée*; but, though indulging in the Englishman's cherished privilege, a far-resounding grumble, they knew full well that the queen's heart beat in sympathy with the people's cares and aspirations. Every cottager admired the womanly fondness which refused to part with the ladies of the bed-chamber in obedience to the dictates of a supposed parliamentary tradition; and the marriage of the queen in Feb., 1840, entwined still closer those bonds of affection between crown and people which had been all but ruptured in the reign of George IV. The fierce republicanism of that generation gradually faded away before the simpler, nobler, and more sympathetic influences which shone from her of whom Tennyson has sung—

> "A thousand claims to reverence closed
> In her as mother, wife, and queen".

But while the crown was regaining its hold on the people's affections, the Whig ministry was feeling the brunt of the unpopularity which is the guerdon of power in times of distress. The general election of August, 1837, left the Whigs with a slender majority over their newly-styled Conservative opponents, ably led by Sir Robert Peel. The leader of the Whig ministry, Lord Melbourne, was not a tower of strength to his anxious following. Indeed, apart from his chivalrous interest in the political training of the young queen, he seemed to find political life a sheer weariness. In receiving a deputation, his chief desire appeared to be to pose gracefully as a modern Gallio, heedless of the important

issues brought before him; and his colleagues failed to remove the impression that the ministry either would not, or could not, assuage the deepening distress of the country. Lord Glenelg's conduct towards the Canadian malcontents inspired no confidence on either side of the Atlantic; Mr Spring Rice failed for five years to present a clean balance-sheet, and the fate of the ministry depended on the energy of one sprightly personality, Lord John Russell. "If (wrote Sydney Smith) the amiable Lord Glenelg were to leave us, we should feel secure in our colonial possessions; if Mr. Spring Rice were to go into holy orders, great would be the joy of the three per cents. A decent, good-looking head of the government might easily be found in lieu of Viscount Melbourne. But in five minutes after the departure of Lord John Russell, the whole Whig government would be dissolved into sparks of Liberality and splinters of Reform." And yet the one clever man of the ministry never enjoyed any general popularity. The scion of the ducal house of Bedford seemed to hold aloof from the rank and file of his followers, either from aristocratic reserve, or from a certain "lofty shyness" of character—to use a phrase felicitously applied by Lord Rosebery to the younger Pitt. Both Pitt and Russell, on throwing off the cares of office, became the most charming of talkers when amidst congenial society. But their frigid demeanour in the House often cooled their friends and heated their opponents, giving to their refusals, their rebukes, or their sarcasms an asperity which probably was never intended. Lord John Russell's facility in giving offence is thus happily hit off by Lord Lytton:—

> "Next, cool, and all unconscious of reproach,
> Comes the calm 'Johnny, who upset the coach'.
> How formed to lead, if not too proud to please—
> His fame would fire you, but his manners freeze.

Like or dislike, he does not care a jot,
He wants your votes, but your affections not."[1]

This lack of paying parliamentary manners undoubtedly increased the annoyance felt by Radicals at an important declaration of policy by the Whig leader in the House of Commons. It was called forth by amendments being proposed to the first queen's speech (Nov., 1837), demanding an extension of the franchise. To this Lord John offered an uncompromising opposition, urging that the reform of 1832 had been made as extensive as possible in the hope that it might be final; that the reopening of the question of the franchise would destroy the stability of our institutions; and that he personally could not assent to the amendments without being guilty of a "breach of faith and honour". This declaration, so creditable to Lord John Russell as a man, excited the liveliest discontent among advanced reformers, who thenceforth dubbed him "Finality Jack". But Radicals proved that they could do more than invent nicknames. With remorseless logic they proved to the Whigs that the measure of 1832 could not be final. There were two principles upon which the people's representatives could be elected: they could represent either the landed wealth of the country, or the people of the United Kingdom. If the former were taken as the basis of representation, then the apportionment of two members to Old Sarum was at any rate intelligible, perhaps even defensible. But the Reform Bill of 1832 had decided in favour of Manchester and against Old Sarum. On what principle but that of population could this have been adopted? It was not the wealth of Manchester which was thenceforth to be represented in Parliament, but the opinion of the people of that town; and if so, why not that of all the men who could think for themselves?

[1] Spencer Walpole's *Life of Lord J. Russell*, vol. i. chap. 12.

The argument was irresistible; and whatever "Finality Jack" might say, the operatives of England regarded the Act of 1832 as a mere half-way house toward household suffrage.

The breach between Whigs and Radicals now rapidly widened, with the result that many of the powerful political associations started during the long and desperate struggle for reform were now turned against the party which they had, five years previously, helped to power. Such, then, was the political position in 1837: our artisans permeated by levelling ideas concerning property; the newly-enfranchised middle class pot-bound by narrow and sordid interests; the aristocracy mainly occupied in "preserving their game"; Parliament imbued with the smug complacency and brusque self-assertion of the Plugsons and modern Taillefers; the crown alone resplendent with a renewed lustre. The outlook was ominous. Indeed, few years of peace have been more critical than the first five of the Victorian era. But for the succession of a popular sovereign, and the hope, ever-cherished though often deferred, of influencing the House of Commons by peaceful agitation, our institutions could scarcely have survived the strain.

Chapter VI.

The Rise of Chartism (1838–1839).

The foregoing description will have shown how favourable were the conditions in our national life for the rise of a formidable democratic agitation. A bad harvest, and a serious commercial crisis in 1837, completed the difficulties of the queen's ministers. Their acts and their words were scanned with jealous scrutiny

by Tories in the House and by democrats in the country. To the parliamentary annalist the Tory gains seemed of chief importance. We can now see that the future of English institutions was being decided, not so much at Westminster, as in the workmen's clubs of our land.

Great commotion had been caused there by recent ministerial utterances. Lord John Russell's command to the billows of democracy—"Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further"—had only served to recall the historic defiance of Mrs. Partington to the ocean. The tide was beginning to turn in against the bulwarks reared in 1832. The London Working-men's Association, irritated by the retention of a penny duty on each newspaper, and by regulations which portended ruin to the cheapest journals, was demanding a drastic reform of Parliament. In a carefully-written pamphlet, *The Rotten House of Commons* (Dec., 1836), the secretary, Lovett, had proved from official returns that, out of the total number of 6,023,752 adult males in the United Kingdom, only 839,519 had votes, while such were the inequalities in the size of the constituencies that 20 members were returned by 2411 voters, while 20 more represented as many as 86,072 electors. Fortified by these facts, the members of the association convened a public meeting at the Crown and Anchor in the Strand for giving cohesion to the demands which now were urged in various quarters; and some 3000 persons adopted and petitioned for what were soon to be called the "six points" of the People's Charter—viz., universal suffrage, abolition of property qualification for members of Parliament, annual Parliaments, equal representation, payment of members of Parliament, and vote by ballot at elections.

The derivation of this new Radical programme from that which was put forward in 1780 has already been explained. It illustrates that continuity of life, that

tenacious clinging to old rights which have been our best safeguard against both despotism and revolution. The similarity of the programmes of 1780 and 1838 extends even to details, the clauses as to registration of voters, and the division of counties into equal electoral districts each returning one member, being almost identical. The thoroughly English custom of appealing to precedent is also observable in both documents, Lovett's introduction to the Charter referring to its identity with the proposals of 1780, while the earlier programme carefully based its claim for household suffrage on the old principle of "no representation—no taxation", and that for payment of representatives on "the wholesome practice of ancient times".

The "six points" were formulated by the London Working-men's Association in the last days of William IV.'s reign; and a committee of six of their members was appointed to confer with six Radical members of Parliament for the drafting of a bill which should give legal expression to these demands. It is clear from the details given by Lovett in his Autobiography that the chief impulse did not come from the parliamentary representatives, but from the working-men. Mr. Roebuck, M.P., well known by his sobriquet Tear 'em, and Lovett were, after some delay, deputed to draft the bill; but owing to Roebuck's championship of the cause of the Canadian insurgents, the work was performed almost entirely by Lovett. At last, on May 8, 1838, the document was published. In an able introduction Lovett referred to the new democratic measure "as a Charter they were determined to obtain". In this phrase, and in a subsequent remark by O'Connell—"There, Lovett, is your Charter: agitate for it, and never be content with anything less"—may be found the origin of the term applied not only to the proposed People's Bill, but to the party and the movement. At the outset, the agitation

was thoroughly constitutional. Lovett called the attention of all the working-men's associations to the Whig origin of the programme, and contrasted the apathy of that party, when installed in power, with their earlier professions, using this as an argument for rendering all parties alike responsible to the people.

The new movement, however, claims our attention, not only from its immense influence on our political life, but also owing to the moral fervour actuating its votaries. In common with Hetherington, Vincent, Place, and others, who struggled for the mental and moral improvement of artisans, Lovett had insisted on the need of a higher ideal of life, if they were wisely to discharge the political rights for which they were struggling. The aims of the London Association, formed in 1836, had been primarily "to create a moral, reflecting, energetic public opinion, so as eventually to lead to a gradual improvement in the condition of the working-classes, without violence or commotion"; to unite the honest, sober, moral, and thinking portion of their brethren; to form libraries and debating societies; to gain a cheap and honest press; to avoid meeting at public-houses; to instruct women and children with a view to domestic happiness; "for, be assured, the good that is to be must be begun by ourselves".

It would be interesting, did space permit, fully to compare these enlightened aims with the views set forth by Carlyle, Owen, and Mazzini. Seven years had elapsed since the gifted Scotsman had published, in his essay *Signs of the Times*, his first indictment against the age, that men were struggling not for internal perfection but for external combinations, for institutions and constitutions. As a criticism of the later phases of Chartism, and, indeed, of latter-day democracy both in England and on the Continent, this assertion would have been perfectly justified; but the extracts above cited prove

conclusively that the founders of Chartism were fully convinced of the futility of mere external reforms for which there had been no preparation in the life of the people. All intelligent democrats—Schiller in Germany, Pestalozzi in Switzerland, and Robert Owen, the "wilful Welshman"—had realized that the failure of democracy in France was due to the lack of that power of self-restraint, of that sense of duty to one's fellows, which forms the moral cement of society. Indeed, this conviction may be regarded as one of the most vitalizing truths of the early part of this century, inspiring many of the educational, philanthropic, and political efforts which sought to alleviate the ever-increasing mass of misery.

> "Ah! your Fouriers failed
> Because not poets enough to understand
> That life develops from within."

This truth, uttered by our most gifted poetess, was being seen by all who had either the eye to gaze beneath the surface, or the sense to bring their schemes to the test of experience. Even Owen's experiments in education and co-operation were to have fruitful results, so far as they helped to mould character and awaken to new inquiry. His educational aim, far in advance of his age, was to fashion fully formed men and women who would always act in a rational manner, and respond, not to force, but to reason. The origin of moral-force Chartism is clearly traceable to the conviction which the compilers of the Charter had imbibed from Robert Owen as to the innate reasonableness of well-educated persons, and the social felicity attainable under conditions which gave equal opportunity to all.

But the highest note sounded by the early Chartist leaders also rings responsive to Mazzini's clarion call of duty. Facts forbid the assumption, otherwise so attrac-

tive, that the leading artisans of London could have had any direct contact with the great Italian thinker before the early part of 1837, when he came as an exile to our metropolis. True, he had, two years earlier, given to the world his prophetic work, *Faith and the Future*; but its circulation appears to have been then limited to Switzerland. A remarkable though unconscious parallelism, however, exists between the views of the early Chartists and those of the Italian democrat who claimed that the struggle for individual rights could but end in anarchy; while a sense of social duty alone could build up a peaceful and noble commonwealth. The struggle for rights, Mazzini asserted, could only destroy, not found; whereas duty associated and constructed. The former killed self-sacrifice and banished martyrdom from the world; whereas duty nerved men to lifelong and disinterested endeavour. The life of Mazzini and the history of latter-day democracy form an instructive commentary on these opposing aims and principles.

The falling away of Chartism from its first ideals cannot be ascribed to the men who struggled equally for the moral improvement and the political enfranchisement of the masses. At first their belief in the power of reason and persuasion seemed fully justified. Their movement began to forge ahead steadily and peacefully in the teeth of many adverse circumstances. Nothing is so dangerous as aimless and hopeless misery. The critical stage of a movement is really well-nigh passed when turbulent and truculent harangues give way to a settled conviction that a remedy is attainable. It was now the aim of the chief Chartist speakers, among whom Vincent and Hetherington were prominent, to prove that they could and would gain from Parliament the political power achieved by the "shopocracy" in 1832. Vincent's glowing and impassioned oratory, and the more logical and closely reasoned speeches of Hetherington, told with

great effect on different types of mind, the former speaker arousing immense interest, which the latter clinched with the grip of conviction. Political clubs were started in several towns, and from feeble beginnings soon grew into formidable bodies. The People's Charter was enthusiastically accepted by immense meetings at Glasgow and Birmingham, in May and August of 1838, and the new agitation received the support of very many of the middle classes, and of their journals. At the former of these meetings Dr. Wade, the well-known writer on industrial and social questions, significantly stated that they had enough physical force behind them, but that they would rely solely on moral force to gain their perfectly legitimate aims.

Such is, in brief outline, a sketch of the chief moral-force Chartists and of their aims. With some of these it is impossible not to feel sympathy. Had all the circumstances of the time been favourable to steady and rapid social advancement of the proletariate, it seems probable that these men might have speedily succeeded in raising the working-men of England to a higher plane of thought and action. It is even possible that they might have peacefully gained for their fellows a great extension of political rights and duties, such as has been ultimately secured through the working of our party system.

It was not to be. The prospects of the movement were soon to be overclouded by the admixture of "physical-force" elements, which represented the cruder and fiercer forces at work in our social life. But, before we notice the warping influence exerted by those who more or less openly advocated recourse to violence, we must glance at the events transpiring at Birmingham, where the second mass meeting of the Chartists was held. Public affairs there were largely under the control of the Birmingham Political Union, an important association

founded mainly for aiding the reformers in 1830–1832. It had recently been revived by its founder, Thomas Attwood, who at that time wielded considerable influence in the Midlands. Yet it is difficult to believe that the men of Birmingham ever took him altogether seriously. A fellow-townsman, Mr. G. J. Holyoake, describes him as a Royalist and Radical, not remarkable for intellectual strength, but endowed with a dignified presence and the faculty of persuasive speech. These qualities, and his control of the local newspaper, partly account for his being returned as one of the two members which Birmingham first sent to Westminster. That town must either have been deeply imbued with the provincialism which Mr. Holyoake notes as a feature of the Midland mind; or possibly his election may be ascribed to a vigorous canvass, in which he is said to have kissed 8000 mothers and their offspring. At any rate, by whatever means acquired, Attwood enjoyed immense popularity in Birmingham, though his reforming zeal seems to have been little more than skin-deep. Resting in complacent contentment with the £10 franchise of 1832, Attwood allowed the Birmingham Political Union to lapse, in 1834, until his failure to convince Parliament of the supreme importance of his own currency fads led him again to dally with democracy. The adoption by Parliament of stringent currency measures, in the autumn of 1836, certainly tended to intensify an impending industrial crisis, and gave Attwood the opportunity of reviving his Union (December, 1836), and of airing his own currency scheme. His popular manners, his suave speech resplendent with golden vistas of prosperity, and, above all, his proprietary rights in the Union, and in the chief newspaper which the Midland capital then boasted, carried the day there for paper currency and the Charter. The latter, in Attwood's eyes, was to be as subservient to the former as the artisans to their middle-class leaders.

Now, it would have needed immense persuasive powers to have reconciled artisans who hankered after a division of property, to the lead of so typical a *bourgeois* as Attwood; and he possessed few of the needed qualifications, except fluency. Even his orations, though popular at the time, aroused suspicions as to the real extent of his mental powers. He rarely concluded a lengthy harangue without contradicting the commencement. At the famous Chartist meeting at Holloway Head, Birmingham, in August, 1838, the enormous length of the procession, the blare of bands and waving of banners, seem to have confused his notions of moral force and physical force; for after stating at the outset that he would never sanction the commission of violence, he exclaimed in his peroration that if the government dared to arrest him, 100,000 men should march to demand his release. Not only his orations but his political schemes seemed to be permeated with hysteria. Emotional indeed must have been the mind which could recommend the working-classes to rest from their toil a whole week—a "sacred week" devoted to peaceful agitation! Yet to the end of his career he persisted in justifying this by the legendary incident of the secession of the Roman *plebs* to the Aventine. A flood of light is thrown upon his character by his sketch, written two years later, of the idyllic proceedings which were to grace the sacred week. "On the first day we will offer up on our bended knee a solemn prayer to God for his blessing on our righteous cause. On the second we will enter into a solemn league and covenant with each other, swearing that we will never cease from legal exertions until the National Petition shall have been carried into a law. The third day of the week we will devote to a general canvass of all the electors of the House of Commons: and so we will go on to the end of the week, which will be the most memorable in the history of the world. I may perish:

but if I live to conduct this great operation, and the people support me, I promise you that our country shall exhibit such a sublime spectacle as the wide earth and the wide range of history never before exhibited."[1] Such was the man whose eccentric nature was to exercise a comet-like influence on the nebulous life of newly enfranchised Birmingham.

In clearness of view and strength of character Attwood yielded the palm to a working-man named John Collins, who soon acquired a reputation for straightforwardness and for the courage with which he, along with Lovett, dared the penalties of the law. His influence was to outlast that of Attwood, as the flight of a bird outstrips that of a butterfly; and ultimately he did much to enroll Birmingham Radicals in the Chartist ranks.

As regards details, we may note that the Birmingham Political Union at first advocated merely household suffrage (as against the universal suffrage of the Charter) and triennial Parliaments, while it omitted equal electoral districts. On the other hand, it laid stress on payment of members of Parliament, and on the need of a heavy property tax which should supersede all other imposts. The indirect influence of these demands was to be considerable. Artisans and no small part of the shopkeepers of the Midlands, after going so far, were soon led to adopt the complete Chartist programme; and the tone of the *Birmingham Journal* became for a time ultra-Radical if not distinctly Chartist.

In fact, the whole trend of events was favouring the advanced wing of the party. If the moral-force men derived their convictions from the teaching of Owen as to the reasonableness of well-informed persons, the men of force could with equal justice point to the hopelessness of expecting constitutional action from the untaught, underfed masses. When oppressed by Corn-

[1] See the *Birmingham Journal* of June 19, 1841.

law and Poor-law alike, could these be expected to keep the peace towards a government which, they asserted, had tricked them in and after 1832, and was using force to crush the justifiable discontent of the Canadians? As has been already noted, the publication of the Charter coincided with a time of intense distress at home. The new Poor-law was being generally enforced when corn was rising to an average of more than sixty shillings per quarter; so that the cruel alternative of liberty with starvation or of state relief in the workhouse confronted increasing numbers of the respectable poor. The close of the year 1837 had witnessed an outbreak in a Leicestershire workhouse which was quelled only by military force. In Kent the popular ignorance, credulity, and hatred of the new law was seen in a riotous concourse of peasants which gathered around a lunatic named Thom, who proclaimed himself the Saviour of the world, especially from the injustice of the new Poor-law. On a body of troops being sent against him from Canterbury, he shot their commander dead. A volley from the soldiers ended his life and scattered his dupes; but they long afterwards cherished the belief that their leader would reappear to rid them of the new tyranny.

Far more serious was the discontent in the north of England, where the old system of poor-relief had been less abused than was the case in the southern and south-midland counties, which the new Act of 1834 saved from impending ruin. The "salutary harshness"—to use Carlyle's phrase—of the new measure accordingly aroused in the north a deep and passionate resentment, which was to be the chief feeder of physical-force Chartism. These feelings were most prominently expressed by two men, Stephens and Oastler, who always called themselves Tories, but whose words and acts fanned the embers of Radicalism well-nigh to a blaze.

Joseph Rayner Stephens was, or rather had been, a Wesleyan minister at Ashton-under-Lyne; but his championship of disestablishment had in 1834 caused his removal from his pastoral charge for having "flagrantly violated the peaceable and antisectarian spirit of Wesleyan Methodism". He thereupon flung himself into the cause of factory reform, then being pressed on by Oastler, Fielden, Sadler, and others; but his powers of inflammatory speech were chiefly directed against the poor-law commissioners and their work. Thus, at Newcastle on January 1, 1838, he threatened that if their enactments were put in force, "Newcastle ought to be, and should be, one blaze of fire, with only one way to put it out, and that with the blood of all those who supported this abominable law". Later on, when speaking at a banquet given to Mr. Fielden, M.P., for his opposition to the law in Parliament, Stephens urged the people to shed their blood rather than submit to that law of devils, which evidently aimed at making the new poor-law Bastilles a chain of barracks for the "Russellite rural police", and for the subjection of a free people. Words like these became highly dangerous when uttered to large torch-light gatherings held around many northern towns in the autumn of 1838, especially when the emotional orator urged the need of muskets. At last, at a vast meeting held at Hyde in Cheshire, the orator, fired by the sight of faces lurid with hunger and hatred, exclaimed that the time for action had come, as the soldiers had been won over to the people's side; and a challenge—"Are you ready?"—was answered by a discharge of firearms. The authorities were now aroused from their half-contemptuous toleration. Stephens was arrested, and was condemned to eighteen months' imprisonment. Never had Lancashire and Cheshire been nearer to open insurrection than on the receipt of this news. Needy operatives showed their regard for the

people's champion by subscribing nearly £2000 for the relief of his wife and family; and the man who was already beginning to utilize this indignation for the physical-force Chartists, won golden opinions by declaring that, should the tyrannical government decide to transport the people's champion, his manacled limbs should pass to the convict ship only over the lifeless body of Feargus O'Connor.

Much as we may sympathize with the characters and even with many of the aims of the moral-force Chartists, these men seem open to the charge of folly in expecting that sweeping changes could be peaceably effected in our constitution, when the masses of the people were so ignorant and excitable as the foregoing recital proves them to have been. The miserable conditions of life in the factory townships had wrought a sinister change not only in the well-being, but in the moral character of the population; and much remedial work was to be done, much legislation to be enacted, before so enlightened a democrat as John Stuart Mill could give his vote for the enfranchisement of all householders. Besides, the Chartist programme itself was open to grave suspicions of serving merely as a prelude to a forcible redistribution of property; and there are grounds for believing that the "six points" by themselves would not at that time have aroused any wide-spread enthusiasm, had they not been irradiated by the golden gleams of Owenism. Neither expectant artisans nor timid *bourgeois* ever forgot that Lovett, Hetherington, and other prominent moral-force men were followers of the seer of New Lanark, who promised that his system must peaceably lead to equalization of fortune. It is true that many of his followers, especially Lovett, had forsaken the hazy fanaticism of Owen in favour of modern co-operative methods. Yet the Owenite taint clung about moral-force Chartism even when it promised the inevitable

triumph of reason and the discomfiture of brute force. All who knew what were the ulterior aims of Robert Owen, and how wide was the popularity of Hodgkin's levelling dogmas, saw the futility of carrying out by peaceful methods aims which *at that time* would have produced revolutionary results. The discouragement which overtook Lovett, Vincent, and others in the midst of their political career may safely be attributed to more than mere disgust at the vagaries of O'Connor. They must have seen that they were in a false position, ostensibly leading a movement that was propelled by unscrupulous men who more correctly interpreted the passions of the crowd. They were the Girondists of English democracy, doomed to personal failure, though some of their ideals were finally to be realized. For the present, they saw popularity slip from their grasp into that of Feargus O'Connor.

Chapter VII.

The Physical-Force Chartists.

Rarely has any man leapt to popularity so deftly and rapidly as the gifted Irishman, who was destined for ten years to be the foremost of democratic leaders and to take the place of O'Connell as the prince of mob orators. Feargus O'Connor, who claimed descent from a line of old Irish kings, first gained a reputation at the Irish bar by his imposing presence, powerful voice, rollicking wit, and consummate assurance.

His forensic successes were, however, only a prelude to a wider popularity. It was in O'Connell's train, or "tail" as irreverent Saxons termed it, that O'Connor first displayed that power over a crowd which a robust

frame, stentorian tones, and fluent oratory generally ensure. When elected member for County Cork in 1832, he soon came into collision with his equally masterful leader, whose fitful acts of complaisance to the Whigs were resented by his more Radical subaltern. As neither could brook opposition, O'Connell was left in undisputed sway in Ireland, while his ambitious compatriot sought a new sphere of conquest in the discontented proletariate of England. O'Connor's success in England was startling and complete. Continental writers who sneer at John Bull's insularity are ignorant of the real catholicity of taste which that much-maligned personage evinces in the presence of genuine merit. The Athens of Pericles was not more appreciative of sterling excellence in men of another race, than were the English working-men on whose feelings Feargus O'Connor played at will, who in more recent times have hung in rapt attention on the stately periods of the great Hungarian patriot Kossuth, and have thronged to shake hands with Garibaldi. The causes of O'Connor's success with the men of the Midlands and North are not far to seek. His brawny frame, thick neck, and distinguished air, appealed at once to an athletic people; and their hearts were won when the descendant of a long line of kings roared forth his denunciations of the Whig tyrants, or, darting from grave to gay, described the treatment which he would accord to "Harry Brougham and his wife" when their power was overthrown and they came to the poorhouse —"Softly, my lady, you go not in with your spouse: turn here, if you please, to the female ward". But popular favour reached its climax when, as happened at Newcastle, O'Connor turned from the facetious topic of workhouse discipline, and the restriction of pauper population, to hurl defiance at the troops who were marching up to the outskirts of the vast throng on the Town Moor. A man whose presence was so command-

ing, whose voice seemed to rend the welkin, whose gibes called forth shouts of laughter, whose indignation could excite a vast crowd to cries of defiance or vengeance, evidently possessed all the superficial characteristics of a Danton. But fortunately for England and for Chartism, O'Connor had neither the statesmanlike width of view nor the persistent audacity which made the leader of the French *sans-culottes* so potent a force in 1792. It is true, the circumstances of 1792 and 1839 were widely different. Probably the heroes of sans-culottism might have cut very sorry figures had they been confronted by forces of law and order so commanding as those of Queen Victoria's government; and possibly Carlyle's verdict as to the Titanesque grandeur of Danton might have been modified, had his hero ever come face to face with a greatly superior force of Parisian special constables. Some allowance must be made for the altered circumstances of the case. Feargus O'Connor, indeed, took care to make every such allowance; for in most of his physical-force outbursts he took refuge in the immunity which attaches to poetical rhapsodies such as—

> "Then onward, your green standards waving,
> Go flesh every sword to the hilt!"

while on other occasions he balanced his most inflammatory appeals with a prudent superfluity of conditional clauses. Of this latter device his speech in the Palace Yard, Westminster (Sept. 17, 1838), offers a good example. After cautioning the people against rioting and civil war he continued—"But still, in the hearing of the House of Commons, I will say that rather than see the people oppressed, rather than see the constitution violated while the people are in daily want,—why then, if no other man will do so, I myself will lead them to death or glory".

But Feargus O'Connor was to win glory, not only as a highly entertaining orator, but as a most effective journalist. He had already succeeded in the somewhat hazardous enterprise of braving the newspaper regulations enacted in 1836. In the course of his political campaign of 1837, he accordingly appealed to some substantial men for help in the establishment of a Radical weekly journal. Several of them clubbed together to subscribe £800 for his venture—the *Northern Star and Leeds Advertiser*, the first number of which appeared on Nov. 18, 1837. It was a large-sized paper of eight pages, and was sold for fourpence halfpenny, the editor being a Mr. Hill, and, later, the well-known physical-force Chartist, George Julian Harney. At the outset, however, it aimed at securing merely universal suffrage, the immediate abolition of the Poor-law of 1834, "and the establishment of a respectable provision, unattended with degradation, for every unwilling idler in the state. . . . We must endeavour to raise working men to a state of perfect equality with their richer neighbours." This pronouncement was evidently intended to attract not only the political Radicals, but also Tory democrats like Oastler and Stephens, and levellers imbued with the theories of Spence and Hodgkin; and even for some time after the publication of the Charter, O'Connor continued to deal in vague tirades and alluring promises. But, skilfully trimming his sails to every shift of the *popularis aura*, O'Connor took up the Chartist programme when its popularity was assured by the great meeting at Birmingham; and what he lacked in originating power was more than atoned for by the increasing vehemence of his advocacy. The defects of his speeches, their tinsel rhetoric, shambling arguments, and random conclusions, were forgotten amidst the impression created by his Celtic complaisance of manner and the reverberations of his stentorian voice, so that his dexterous

championship of physical force began to turn the scale against the more prudent counsels of the best artisans of London, Birmingham, and Edinburgh.

The great popularity of his paper, some 60,000 copies of which were sold every week, not only increased his influence, but depressed that of rivals. For a time he had, as regular contributor, Bronterre O'Brien, a man of great energy and ability, devoted to the levelling theories of the day; but before long ambition and love of power led to their separation, amidst mutual exasperation. Bronterre O'Brien was perhaps superior in mental training and attainments to all the Chartist leaders. He had shown his journalistic powers in numerous articles written for Hetherington's unstamped paper, and his literary skill in a forcible defence of Robespierre. As an orator he excelled equally in argument, satire, or passionate invective; while his grip on practical life was to be shown by his merciless exposure of the silly scheme of a sacred month. The antipathy existing between him and O'Connor finally became an open feud, which seriously damaged the Chartist cause. After leaving the *Northern Star*, O'Brien started a paper called the *Operative*; but neither this nor Hetherington's *London Despatch*—the chief organ of the moral-force party—enjoyed the success of O'Connor's organ, which was unrivalled in the history of popular journalism. The very defects of the paper seemed to drive it to the front. No bluster about the right of revolt could be talked by a quaking tiro in a village barn but it was tricked out and belauded by the sensational northern journal; and the London Working-men's Association had the mortification of witnessing the perversion of the popular press and the degradation of their democratic ideals.

Besides the journals named above, the chief Radical newspapers were Henry Vincent's (unstamped) *Western Vindicator*, published at Bath; the *Northern Liberator*,

published at Newcastle; the *True Scotsman*, published at Edinburgh; William Carpenter's *Charter*; and the *Champion*, edited by the sons of William Cobbett. All of these papers, in spite of occasional fiery articles, advocated moral-force principles; but the deepening distress of the time inclined the balance in favour of more violent counsels. The connection between misery and physical-force Chartism was seen not only in the factory districts, where Oastler was hailed as "king", but also in the metropolis. The silk-weavers of Spitalfields, reduced to the verge of starvation by the decline of their industry, offered promising materials for would-be revolutionists, such as the uncompromising George Julian Harney. This ardent young man, after suffering three terms of imprisonment for his work in connection with the free-press agitation, was now the life and soul of the London Democratic Association, which soon numbered some 3000 members, drawn mainly from the suffering masses of East London. The wearing of the red cap of liberty, and the words "Universal suffrage or death" at the end of their documents, revealed their admiration for the principles of Robespierre, and conveyed the hint that even the methods of Marat might be applied to the British *bourgeoisie*.

Another frank and fearless champion of a forcible overthrow of government was Dr. John Taylor, perhaps the ablest of the Scottish Chartists. Coming of a good Ayrshire family, he had been trained for the medical profession, which he had practised first in the navy, and later at Glasgow. His bold sailor-like bearing and affable manners, his manly appearance and fluent speech, together with his honest indignation at the misery of the poor, marked him out as one of the worthiest and most popular of Chartist leaders. Lowery, once a tailor, was one of the clearest and most convincing speakers: his small and rather deformed figure seemed to plead for

the victims of the slop-shop and the sweater's den, and presented a contrast to his mental gifts, which may possibly have suggested to Kingsley the character of Alton Locke.

It is impossible to describe in detail the local leaders. Rider of Leeds, Marsden of Preston, Dr. M'Douall of Ashton-under-Lyne, and Neesom of Bristol were prominent advocates of physical force in the Chartist Convention, which now claims a brief notice.

Delegates from Chartist clubs or gatherings were elected early in the year 1839 to form a Convention, which was to draw up the petition for the Charter, and discuss matters relating to the democratic cause. At the first meetings of the Convention in London (Feb. 1839) the schism in the Chartist ranks became apparent. The sons of William Cobbett, acting along with Dr. Wade and others, demanded that the work of the Convention should cease with the presentation of the petition, a half-hearted motion which was rejected mainly through the vigorous oratory of O'Connor, Harney, and Marsden. Thereupon three delegates from Birmingham, Dr. Wade, and other Cobbettites successively withdrew from the Convention. For various reasons this body now decided to remove to Birmingham (May 13), a step which was to increase the excitement already existing in the Midland capital. Events which will presently be described served to exasperate even the most law-abiding Chartists, and elicited from one of the Scottish delegates to the Convention the threat—"We must shake our oppressors well over hell's mouth, but we must not let them drop in". When such was the sentiment of a moral-force Chartist, it seems surprising that the peace was preserved at vast meetings held at Whitsuntide, in pursuance of the advice of the Convention. The increasing schism in that body seems to have suggested this device of throwing the responsibility for future action on to the people,

whose advice was to be sought on the following subjects: withdrawal of money from banks, the advisability of a "sacred month", of procuring arms, and of dealing exclusively at "Chartist" shops. As might have been expected from all signs of the times, the vast meetings held at Kennington Common; Kearsall Moor, near Manchester; Peep Green, in the West Riding of Yorkshire; Glasgow; and among the miners of Monmouthshire, decided virtually in favour of the less prudent course.

A slight acquaintance with human nature might have warned the moral-force Chartists against an appeal to mass meetings. Great are the perils of emotional oratory. The speaker who appears to hold his audience spell-bound is himself a victim to the subtle influence reflected from a sea of upturned faces; and the more potent the electric current of sympathy necessary to oratorical success, the more completely does the speaker merge his individuality in the excited crowd which confronts him. Moreover, the simultaneous meetings of Whitsuntide were held shortly after the arrival of news from the West sufficient to dash all hopes of a peaceful compromise. Vincent had just been arrested at Newport. This does not appear altogether to have been due to magisterial tyranny and the selfish fears of shopkeepers. Vincent's conduct must be held largely responsible for the collision. Once a supporter of moral force, he had lately been drawn on by his sympathetic nature into excited harangues that endangered the peace of the west country. The desire to be in the forefront of the enthusiasts, always a mischievous influence in times of excitement, had even led one of Vincent's ardent supporters, a chemist of Trowbridge, named Potts, to decorate his shop window with bullets labelled Tory pills.[1] General alarm was caused in the west by Vincent's oratory, and the authorities determined

[1] Gammage, *History of the Chartist Movement*, p. 80 (edition of 1894).

to arrest him for a speech delivered at Newport, in which he was reported to have exclaimed, "When the time for resistance arrives, let your cry be, 'To your tents, O Israel'". It is only fair to add that Vincent and his friends denied any seditious intention in this speech, and charged the magistrates with endeavouring to provoke a disturbance by his arrest. For the present the miners of that county were held in check by the military; but the news of Vincent's imprisonment aroused fierce indignation, which subsequent events at Newport were to intensify.

The exasperation caused by this news found vent in the suggestions of O'Connor, Dr. Taylor, and others that a run on the banks should be forthwith commenced, and that a "sacred month" should be observed by all operatives. The latter proposal, first proposed by the leveller Benbow in 1831, and recently set to idyllic music by Mr. Attwood, was now received with loud applause, though a contemporary observer remarks that the artisans who, amidst the excitement of meetings, cheered for the month's holiday, were afterwards beset with misgivings in their own homes. The proposal was really acceptable only to the dupes who could not gauge its results, to the knaves who desired civil war, and to hard-pressed manufacturers who desired a temporary relief from the burden of unremunerative wages. Indeed, its approval by masters as a cure for over-production was so marked as to enlighten some of the dupes; while the knaves unmasked their own designs by suggesting that the sacred month should be during harvest, thus leaving the crops to the mercy of the elements. Lovett and Bronterre O'Brien by persistent efforts succeeded in postponing the acceptance of this proposal until after the decision of Parliament as to the National Petition for the Charter.

This document was of a legal and wholly unobjection-

able tenor, recommending the adoption by Parliament of the "points" above named, with the exception of that for equal electoral districts, which was now omitted. The methods of the canvassers had in some cases, it is true, been menacing, especially that of entering in a "black book" the names of those who refused to support the democratic cause; and the suggestion of the *Northern Star*, that half a million of men armed with muskets ought to escort the petition to Westminster, may well have prejudiced Parliament against the petition. It was perhaps also unfortunate that the document was presented (June 14, 1839) by Mr. Attwood, whose eccentricities were undermining his influence both in Parliament and in the country. The appearance of the National Petition as a huge cylinder of parchment, rolled into the House by stalwart backers, was also provocative of mirth; but there was little, if any, of that contemptuous behaviour which the Chartists believed to have been shown towards their document. On the contrary, the House suspended one of its standing orders, so as to allow Mr. Attwood to make a speech concerning the monster petition; and it fixed July 12 as the day for hearing a detailed statement of the Chartist case.

But before that date arrived, events had happened at Birmingham which further widened the breach between Parliament and people. The Midland capital had for some weeks been disturbed by Chartist meetings held in one of the central points of that busy town. In the open space near Nelson's statue, called the Bull Ring, where bull-baiting had until recently ministered to the athletic instincts of the Midlanders, the newer democratic excitement had sought an outlet in the public reading of the one weekly newspaper which Birmingham could at that time support. After reading aloud the *Birmingham Journal* to a crowd eager for news and oratory, the reader gave his comments in forcible terms.

After a prohibition of these meetings by the mayor, they were transferred for a time to other less central spots. Nevertheless the local Chartist leaders, owing to alleged violent language, were arrested by "the two constables of the town" assisted by "two police officers and two of the town watchmen". The growing excitement convinced the mayor, Mr. Scholefield, that the disjointed police force of the town would not suffice to put a stop to the meetings in the Bull Ring, which were now defiantly resumed. It was in vain that the mayor went in person to that spot to beg the people not to assemble. The magistrates, unable to compose the popular tumults, applied to Lord John Russell for a contingent of London police. On the arrival of the metropolitan constables they were at once conveyed in omnibuses near to the Bull Ring, and were ordered by the mayor and magistrates to disperse the crowd "quietly and temperately but firmly and decidedly". Selecting from these self-cancelling orders the rule of conduct most congenial to themselves, the constabulary marched to the attack; and, led though they were by the mayor, began to use their truncheons on all who seemed inclined to dispute their progress. After a moment's pause of sheer consternation the crowd scattered in headlong flight. Flushed with their triumph, the constables became separated in the ardour of the pursuit, until they fell an easy prey to the rallying populace. Chased now in their turn, they took refuge in the Public Office, where they remained until the arrival of the military released them and cowed the rioters, who were beginning to tear down the iron railings of St. Thomas' Church.

Such was July 4th—the prelude to a far more serious riot eleven days later. For in the meantime the overbearing conduct of the London police inflamed the wrath of the townsfolk, which increased on the news of the arrest of Dr. Taylor, Lovett, and Collins. Taylor's

crime was his alleged participation in the riot, though he interfered at the end only to prevent the maltreatment of the police by the victorious mob. The crime of Lovett and Collins was the signature of the protest drawn up by the National Convention against the conduct of the police and the arrest of Dr. Taylor. Far more serious, however, was the provocation given to the people by the decisive refusal of Parliament (July 12) even to consider the National Petition for the Charter. Lord John Russell denied that the electorate needed any expansion, and that there was much misery in the land; while he declaimed against the Chartists as promoting disorder with a view to the equal division of property. After this rebuff an outburst of indignation was almost inevitable.

Still, there seemed to be few signs of a riot at 5 P.M. on July 15, when the mayor left the Public Office for his villa at Edgbaston. A crowd of men and boys had, it is true, assembled at Holloway Head, attracted by a suspicious notice that Mr. Attwood, the Radical member for Birmingham, would address them there. As Attwood was then in London, this was obviously a device for drawing together a crowd to hear their member's account of his reception by the House of Commons. Disappointed by Attwood's non-arrival, the Chartists marched in procession through the town, along the Warwick road, to meet Lovett and Collins, who, having found bail, had just been released from the county prison. Linking arm in arm, the Radicals marched in orderly ranks through the Bull Ring, and were proceeding towards the Warwick road, when news followed that the London police were maltreating people in the Bull Ring. The truth was that they had roughly arrested a man who was reading aloud from a newspaper, and that his auditors had forcibly rescued him. This news was the spark which set Birmingham in a blaze.

At once the procession turned back for vengeance on the hated policemen before their expected return to London. Even now, appeals to the good sense of the crowd were not wanting; but they were lost on the more inflammable spirits, who, overpowering the police, kept them cooped up in the Public Office. The demons of class hatred, riot, plunder, were now let loose. Gangs of youths began to march into the neighbouring streets, breaking open the shops and scattering about their goods. The sight of the smashed shutters and strewn linen of a draper's shop suggested a bonfire, and soon an enormous fire was blazing in front of Nelson's statue, whence brands were forthwith plucked to fire any dwelling as private malice or blind love of destruction dictated. The latter impulse certainly was uppermost; for most of the incendiaries were mere lads, one who fired a chemist's shop being a shoeless ragged urchin. Where were the stalwart London constables in the meantime? Held in reserve in the Public Office until the arrival of two magistrates to read the Riot Act. And the mayor and magistrates? Were at home in the suburbs, ignorant of the pandæmonium in the Bull Ring. The one magistrate who did arrive judged that the mob was too large and fierce to quell until the soldiers came up. At last the cumbrous legal machinery got the redcoats and bluecoats to work; and their action speedily dispersed the rioters, the thieves being now glutted with plunder, while the hobbledehoys slunk away, alarmed at the results of their own temerity. The destruction was, indeed, considerable, amounting to some £40,000 or £50,000. Yet the committee of the town-council which was charged to report on these events asserted the damage to be less than that caused by the ultra-loyalists of Birmingham in the Priestley riots of 1792; and they ended their investigation (to which I am mainly indebted for the foregoing account) with a protest

against their town being forthwith burdened by a new constabulary force dependent on the government, and therefore "insulting to the people of Birmingham, and dangerous to the municipal rights and liberties of the country at large".[1] Irritation against the new centralized system of police may perhaps have biased the judgment of the committee; but all the evidence seems to convict the London police of overbearing conduct, and gives some colour to the arguments of Chartists that the government sought to provoke them to deeds of violence. On the other hand, the Duke of Wellington sought to make party capital out of the occurrence by taunting the government with having done nothing to prevent disorder in Birmingham; and he further merged the statesman in the partisan by making (on newspaper evidence) an assertion which sounded strangely on the lips of the victor of Badajoz, that the state of Birmingham after the Chartist riots was worse than that of a city taken by storm.

The facts of the case, when stripped of the exaggeration of partisans or alarmists, appear to be these: that the government did either too much or too little; either they should have sent an overwhelming force of soldiers or police, or they should have counselled the use of the most conciliatory methods. As for the local authorities, they seem open to censure for lack of foresight and preparation at a time when the rejection of the Charter by Parliament portended a renewal of conflict with the

[1] Russell's Police Bill of 1839, as modified at Peel's suggestion, empowered any town to raise and support a local police, subject, however, to the general control of commissioners, who had similar powers over the county police raised by county magistrates. The events of 1839, then, hurried on the formation of a police force, which was rendered compulsory and therefore universal by the act of 1856. It should be added that owing to the protests of the men of Birmingham, led by Joseph Sturge, the original proposals for subjecting the police force to a central commissioner were so far modified as to leave the chief control to local elective authorities See *Memoirs of J. Sturge*, ch. 12.

detested London police. An official inquiry, however, exonerated them from blame; and it is clear that the events of July 15, far from being organized, were unexpected, and may even be classed as fortuitous.

The real sufferers were not the Birmingham tradesmen, nor even the rate-payers in the "hundred of Hemlingford", who had to pay their damages, but the Chartists themselves. The previous disturbances at Birmingham, together with riots at Llanidloes, seemed to give colour to the assertions of Lord John Russell, and of Whig and Tory newspapers, that Chartists were mere sedition-mongers. It was in vain that the Chartist Convention, on the motion of Bronterre O'Brien, expressed its disapproval of the insane project of a "sacred month" (Aug. 6), and urged the use only of constitutional methods. Repression and imprisonment were now the order of the day. At Warwick, Lovett and Collins were sentenced to a year's imprisonment. The same sentence was meted out to Vincent at Newport. Many others, including Bronterre O'Brien, were harshly punished; while O'Connor, perhaps the most seditious of all, was released from detention on suspiciously small bail. Thinned by defections or arrests, and weakened still more by internal dissensions, the first Chartist Convention declared its dissolution on Sept. 6, 1839.

The first genuinely democratic assembly which had met on English soil for centuries displayed many of the best, but also some of the weaker, political qualities of our race—a sturdy belief in the ultimately healing effect of liberty and in the ability of overwrought operatives to use that precious boon without abusing it, an equally persistent determination to abide by the laws if the lawmakers showed fair-play, and a certain dogged patience amidst depressing and occasionally exasperating circumstances which few peoples are wont to evince. But

along with these good qualities was to be seen that proneness to faction and schism which hinders Britons from effective organization, and defers the triumph of democracy to a time when firmer cohesion has been learnt in the school of adversity. And yet a comparison of the debates in the Convention with those of the House of Commons in the summer of 1839, so far from discrediting the Chartist cause, will show why the democratic claims, when freed from the suspicions which then naturally attached to them, have in our own days received almost complete recognition.

It is unnecessary to follow in similar detail the events of 1839–1841, which further exasperated the Chartists; but a brief notice must be given to the outbreak at Newport on Nov. 4, 1839, if only from the fact of its being the last serious collision which has occurred between the people and the authorities in England. The arrest of Henry Vincent, and his harsh treatment as a common felon in Monmouth jail, had aroused fierce resentment among the miners, who had often hung on the words of "the Chartist Demosthenes". Appeals, which received the support of Lord Brougham, were made, and with some slight success, in favour of more lenient treatment. Prominent among those who made the appeals was a tradesman and magistrate of Newport named Frost. For his vehement Chartist speeches Lord John Russell had recently dismissed him from the magistracy, an act against which his fellow-citizens protested. Smarting under his own and his party's wrongs, Frost planned with the miners of his county a great armed demonstration for the release of Vincent and other prisoners. The miners, some armed with muskets, others with pickaxes or iron-tipped sticks, were to have seized Newport in the dead of night. But the heavy rain and miry roads damped the ardour of very many and delayed the march of the most determined, so that the autho-

rities were able hastily to dispose thirty soldiers and several special constables in an hotel which then stood in a commanding position in the town. As the miners, numbering some thousands, began to flood the space in front of the hotel, the mayor summoned them to disperse, and on their refusal read the Riot Act. The shutters were then thrown open for the soldiers to reply to the dropping shots now directed against the building. Three volleys killed twenty Chartists, besides wounding many more; and the rioters fled in confusion.

In the trial of Frost and his accomplices for high treason, it was stated upon oath by one witness that the ringleaders had planned to stop the mail-coach for Birmingham, and that its non-arrival there was to serve as a signal for a general revolt through the Midlands and North. This story, which constituted a grave charge of high treason, had gained general credence, though upon slender evidence. Its flimsiness was skilfully demonstrated by the able counsel for the defence, who reminded the jury that the Newport mail-bags were always ferried across the Severn to join the mail-coach, which would in any case run from Bristol to Birmingham. The evidence was not absolutely decisive of the charge that Frost, Williams, and Jones led the mob wittingly to attack the soldiers. The charge of high treason was, however, held to be made good at law; and for nearly the last time a British court of justice heard the awful doom awaiting a traitor, of being drawn on a hurdle to the scaffold, there to be hanged and decapitated (Jan. 1840). The commutation of this brutal sentence to transportation for life was one of the unhappily few exhibitions of mercy towards men rendered desperate by their wrongs; and the whole policy of the government further envenomed the feelings of millions of Radicals during the months of hopeless misery that followed. Despair settled down not only on our artisans,

but on our thinkers. "The state of society in England", wrote Dr. Arnold to Thomas Carlyle in Jan., 1840, "was never yet paralleled in history." And the seer of Chelsea prefaced his epoch-marking work, *Chartism*, with the warning that the essence of Chartism had not been put down:—"The matter of Chartism is weighty, deep-rooted, far-extending; did not begin yesterday; will by no means end this day or to-morrow".

Chapter VIII.

The Complete-Suffrage Movement.

It is a well-known fact that a beaten crew always consoles itself by quarrelling. The feather-weights, accused of weakness and scratchiness, retaliate by accusing ponderous number five of being an expensive passenger; while all agree that stroke was irregular and "cox" steered wildly.

As in aquatics, so in politics, failure sows broadcast a plentiful crop of suspicions and recriminations. Charges of folly against the headstrong are met by taunts of cowardice or bribery flung at the prudent; and after the war of ink and mud has ceased, those are seen to be the least bespattered who have flung most assiduously. Truth herself meanwhile retires to a safe distance; and the prudent historian generally imitates the action of his guiding deity, hopeless of discerning fact amid the wordy war. He notes, however, that prudence and moderation are for the time overborne by the stalwarts, who by the success of their own verbosity are lured still further on their dangerous path.

Such was the general condition of the Chartist movement in and after 1840. The mutual distrust of

leaders and followers, the conflicts between "moral force" and "physical force", were more damaging to the cause than all the repressive measures of government. They argued a mental unfitness to manage the affairs of the party, still more, therefore, the affairs of the whole nation. Enlightened Radicals mourned over the schisms, and many of them discerned the cause to be a lack of any effective education. Their judgment was correct. It is ignorance which isolates men, keeping each individual intrenched in his own notions and prejudices and therefore unable or unwilling to merge his will in the collective will, save under the pressure of force. Ignorance, accordingly, though the best ally of despotism, is the deadliest foe of democracy.

Perhaps there is one mental state which is rather more mischievous than complete ignorance, viz. the first glimmer of knowledge which in shallow natures begets conceit; for then the mind, newly awakened by newspaper articles or heated club rhetoric, clings to its shred of truth as if it were the whole truth. Such was the perilous position of British democracy in the Chartist times. The occasion called for a Socrates to teach men the eternal truth that the first step towards wisdom is the consciousness of ignorance. It found the teacher in Thomas Carlyle, who in varied cadences, from the freshness and buoyancy of *Past and Present* (1843) to the wail of despair which echoes through his *Latter Day Pamphlets*, ceased not to teach the rich their responsibilities, the idle the sacredness of labour, and the whole people that they were "mostly fools". In more sympathetic and therefore more telling words, the Rev. Frederick Denison Maurice pleaded for national education as the only means of securing a healthy and noble existence for the people; and the increasing demand for effective training of the popular intelligence led up to the hapless Education Act of 1843 and to the further

efforts of Mr. Forster, a pupil of Carlyle, which were crowned with success in 1870.

Not only among the leaders of thought, but also among the more keen-sighted Chartists themselves, lack of education was felt to be a fruitful cause of disunion. Dr. Black, the founder of the London Working-men's Association, had noted their intolerance of opposition, and had endeavoured by educational agencies to promote a wider and more tolerant spirit. His pupil Lovett amidst the schisms of 1839 realized the need of education if Chartism was to succeed; and during the term of imprisonment which he spent with Collins in Warwick jail he wrote, with some help from his fellow-prisoner, a little book, *Chartism*, which pointed working-men to popular education as the necessary preparation for wiser action in the future. Alike spurning and despairing of any help from government, Lovett proposed that the people should educate themselves by a vast voluntary effort. The subscription of a penny a week by every one who had signed the national petition for the Charter would, he affirmed, yield a fund sufficient to establish 80 "district halls" and 710 circulating libraries, besides maintaining four paid Chartist lecturers and distributing 20,000 political tracts. The proposed education was of course to lead up to definite political results, by undermining the old edifice of privilege and rearing on firm foundations the new structure of democracy. Such was Lovett's new programme—an English and more practical version of the programme of education and insurrection which Mazzini had ten years before sketched for his association of *Young Italy*.

Meanwhile other Chartist leaders, while debarred by prison walls from joining in the disputes of their subalterns, were devising schemes which further divided their already distracted followers. Henry Vincent, now

cured of his physical-force leanings, saw no hope for Chartists unless they became teetotallers, whence he and his followers were dubbed Teetotal Chartists by Feargus O'Connor, and were denounced as trailing a red-herring across the path of Radical reform. For the same cause the *Northern Star* sneered at Lovett's educational efforts as "Knowledge Chartism"; while it reprobated as mere Christian Chartism an interesting effort of Scottish Radicals to combine political propaganda with religious services in a sort of Labour Church. All these, O'Connor's newspaper asserted, were middle-class traps to lead astray the true believers from the narrow path leading up to the People's Charter. There was much force in these objections; and had not O'Connor himself commenced to trail red-herrings across the path, his criticisms would have been fatal to Lovett, Vincent, and all other rivals. In fact, O'Connor now held a position of great power. After a brief term of imprisonment in York Castle, he speedily regained the popular favour which he had lost by blowing hot and cold on the subject of the projected popular rising of November, 1839. The sight of their favourite orator dressed in a suit of workman's fustian effaced the memory of his unavailing bluster, and again his fiery force swept the mass of Radical working-men along in his train. But while protesting against any deviation from the five points of the Charter, and their cynosure the *Northern Star*, O'Connor was advocating measures which were equally provocative of discord. He and his numerous supporters founded a National Charter Association, including numerous affiliated clubs, for the purpose of making the Charter the law of the land. But, as no less an authority than Francis Place pointed out, the plan of the association violated the old law against "corresponding societies", which threatened all adherents with transportation. The refusal of many

moral-force Chartists to join an illegal association naturally exposed them to the taunt of cowardice, while they could retort that the scheme was intended as a means of ruining the cause. Another plan of O'Connor and his associates served still further to disunite the Radical ranks. This was a "land scheme" for settling labourers and their families in agricultural communities. The success which finally attended some of these Chartist settlements sufficiently attests the feasibility of the proposal. But at the outset it was open to the criticism of being illegal, or at least of not being recognizable at law, or offering protection to investors. The suspicion which generally dogs the steps of the popularity-hunter fastened on this glaring defect in the proposal; and sinister motives were with much frankness ascribed as the *raison d'être* of the whole scheme. The objection gained weight from the fact that co-operative associations were but feebly guarded by law from the frauds of designing secretaries and treasurers, who not unfrequently absconded with the funds.

The third cause of schism was the inclusion in the revised national petition for the Charter of a clause for the repeal of the union between Great Britain and Ireland. Many Chartists, especially those in Scotland, and the members of Lovett's new National Association, warmly protested against the intrusion of so alien a topic into the Chartist programme. Hence the national petition for the Charter was signed by smaller numbers in 1842 than in 1839. But there was another reason for the decline of Chartism which commenced in 1842, and that was the competition of the Complete-Suffrage Movement, which will always be associated with the name of Joseph Sturge.

Joseph Sturge was born in 1793. He came of an old Quaker family which maintained the tenets and practices of that benevolent society with the quiet tenacity that

has enabled the meek, first to weary out their persecutors, and, in these later times, to inherit the earth. As a youth of twenty years of age, Joseph had borne testimony to his horror of all means of compulsion, especially when designed for warlike ends. When drawn for the militia, he allowed the sheep of his farm to be driven off in payment of the fine for refusal to serve. Turning subsequently to the corn trade, he settled at Birmingham, where his unswerving integrity and massive simplicity of character won general respect. After taking a prominent share in the emancipation movement, he was drawn more closely into political life by the Birmingham riots of 1839, when he firmly protested against the conduct of the London constables and the proposal of a centralized police force. The contrast between the sufferings of the masses and the general apathy of Whigs and Tories served to convince him of the need for a far completer act of enfranchisement than that accorded by the measure of 1832. In 1841 he wrote to Mr. Cobden—"I have been driven to the conclusion that it is not only hopeless to expect justice for the labouring population from the representatives of the present constituencies, but that the infatuated policy which now guides our rulers will be persisted in until they plunge millions into want and misery". The "infatuated policy", of course, was the support more or less completely accorded by both the historic parties to the corn-laws. But Sturge had in view much more than the cheapening of bread: he declared that patriotism and Christianity alike required men to strive by all peaceable and legitimate means to remove "the enormous evil of class legislation". As he had striven for the emancipation of black slaves in our colonies, so now his heart went out to the white slaves who were at the mercy of industrial conditions and economic laws that seemed to be inexorable. But could not the power of the collective

will mitigate those conditions and deflect those laws? Above all, did not religious principle require the effort? "It is a beautiful and distinguishing feature of Christianity (he wrote) that it leads us to recognize every country as our country, and every man as our brother; and as there is no moral degradation so awful, no physical misery so great as that inflicted by personal slavery, I have felt it my duty to labour for its universal extinction."

His first public avowal of sympathy with the Chartist demands was at the close of a meeting of the Anti-Corn-law League held at Manchester in November, 1841, when he invited the delegates to remain behind for the discussion of a plan of Radical reform, based on universal suffrage. The keen interest evinced at this informal meeting proved not only the respect felt for the proposer, but also the general conviction of the Free-traders of the need of union with the working-classes. Hitherto the league had found the opposition of Chartist working-men to be fully as formidable as that of landlords and farmers. Countless meetings had been disturbed or broken up by the champions of the Charter, who never tired of declaiming against free-trade as another middle-class trick. In his interesting *Autobiography*, Thomas Cooper has recorded the impression, resulting in his conversion to Chartism, produced by a Chartist lecturer at Leicester, who thus declaimed against the Cobdenites—"Don't be deceived by the middle classes again. You helped them to get their votes. But where are the fine promises they made you? . . . Municipal reform has been for their benefit, not for yours; and so with all their other reforms. And now they want to get the Corn-laws repealed—not for your benefit, but for their own. 'Cheap bread', they cry: but they mean 'Low wages'. Don't listen to their cant and humbug. Stick to your Charter. You are slaves without your votes."

A strict sense of Christian duty and a desire to reconcile two important movements, the collisions between which had been fatal to both, impelled Joseph Sturge to proceed with his complete-suffrage agitation; and in the closing days of 1841 he and other Cobdenites issued the programme which marks the first organized attempt to remove the suspicions and hatred separating the middle and working classes during the past seven years. If for no other reason, the work of the Complete-Suffrage Association, founded at Birmingham early in 1842, deserves careful attention. As long as suspicions were nursed by *bourgeois* and operatives, their agitations for cheap bread and the Charter could not gain that irresistible momentum which had carried the Reform Bill of 1832, and was destined to gain the Reform Act of 1884. Lacking the support of most factory workers, the Free-traders could hardly hope for success; while the Chartists, spurning the advice of men of light and leading, were in danger of following will-o'-the-wisps into mazes of faction or bottomless bogs of intrigue.

The aim of Joseph Sturge and his associates was to adopt all the fundamentals of Chartism, while dispensing with compromising leaders and their objectionable methods. Above all, the claim for universal suffrage must be based on constitutional grounds, and urged with reason. Here, indeed, they had a strong case. Before Sir Robert Peel commenced the much-needed reform of our finances, a great part of the taxation was borne by the working-classes in the enhanced price of the necessaries of life. The Complete-Suffrage Association could therefore urge with much force that a fundamental principle of our constitution was violated by the exclusion of a majority of those classes from the parliamentary franchise.[1] They quoted Blackstone's

[1] In a remarkable series of articles in the *Nonconformist*, which he had just founded, Mr. Edward Miall dwelt strongly on this very practical griev-

assertion that "no subject of England can be constrained to pay any aids or taxes, even for the defence of the realm or the support of the government, but such as are imposed by his own consent or that of his representatives in Parliament". Appealing to this well-known principle, the new association summoned to Birmingham popularly elected delegates to draw up the programme. *Bourgeois* and artisan delegates came in about equal numbers. During four days they deplored the mistakes and discords of the past, and finally, with shouts of joy and tears of emotion, carried proposals which practically embodied the (original) People's Charter.

For a time the alliance between the Sturgeites and Chartists seemed to be complete; and at a by-election at Nottingham the Quaker advocate of peace and progress had the embarrassing support of O'Connor's brazen voice and redoubtable fists. The election was in many ways remarkable. In the preceding general election of July 1841 one of the successful Whig candidates was known to have used bribery so wholesale and barefaced that the mere threat of legal proceedings procured his speedy retirement in favour of his Tory opponent, Mr. Walter of the *Times*. To spoil this game of battledore and shuttlecock between the two historic parties, the Radicals put forward Mr. Sturge as candidate. Like a fresh north wind blowing upon miasma came Sturge's incisive

ance:—"The poor are almost wholly unprotected. They are taxed more heavily than any other class. Law, accessible to others, is of small avail to them. The fruits of their toil are wrested from them, and industry and skill, their only property, taken from them to augment the boundless wealth of the landlords." Miall proposed to exclude from the franchise aliens, minors, paupers, and all who had been convicted of crime. Referring to the alleged corruptibility of the masses, he maintained that we never had had an honest electorate, and that manhood suffrage would make bribery almost impossible! His attempt to refute the contention that education should precede the grant of the franchise was equally inconclusive. (See *Life of Edward Miall*, ch. 5.)

declaration that he would stand for Nottingham provided that no money was spent and no improper influence used to bias a single voter in his favour. For the first time a candidate was bold enough to declare that he would not spend a sixpence on his election, and would dispense with banners, processions, personal canvass, and public-house support. Perhaps the novelty of this declaration appealed as powerfully as its moral courage to the popular sympathy, which was strongly evoked. Thus, when the terrible "Tory lambs" of Nottingham attempted a rush against the people's favourite, they were met and routed by a charge of Feargus O'Connor, Thomas Cooper, and other Chartists, which sent the Rev. Rayner Stephens in headlong flight from the Tory hustings. In the end Sturge was defeated by a slender majority, but an election petition having unseated Mr. Walter, another complete-suffrage candidate was returned for Nottingham.

Meanwhile in the House of Commons itself events were happening which favoured the champions of reform. The disclosures effected by Mr. Roebuck's "Elections' Compromise Committee" convinced many members that little was to be hoped from the existing electoral system.

But the Radical movement, while forging ahead, was suddenly checked by the terrible strikes of the summer of 1842. With wheat at sixty-five shillings the quarter, and work and wages declining, the misery of our operatives was a direct incentive to violent outbreaks. The increasing power of the trade-unions determined the direction of the popular discontent towards strikes, which spread through the Midlands and North amid scenes of reckless violence. Originating in some petty tyrannies of Staffordshire masters, the movement became almost a labour war; and bands of operatives marched about, compelling mills to stop work, and in

some cases smashing the machinery, or pulling the plugs from reservoirs. In the Potteries, at Stockport, Blackburn, and Preston, there was serious rioting; and the physical-force Chartists, with overweening contempt of the "moral-force humbugs", boasted that, having stopped every manufactory within fifty miles of Manchester, the men were masters of the situation. The determined action of the authorities, the conciliatory attitude of several masters, and the ingathering of a bounteous harvest, served speedily to restore order to the country, prosperity to trade, and comfort to the home; but the work of class reconciliation was seriously hindered by the plug riots, the consequent arrests, and the silly charges that the Cobdenites had instigated the acts of violence.

The results of the breach of confidence were seen in a conference between the "complete suffragists" and the Chartists held at Birmingham in Dec. 1842. The question was now more than ever one of men, not of measures. Though the programmes were substantially the same, the differences between tweedledum and tweedledee were hotly discussed. Even Lovett declared that he would never surrender the name of the People's Charter for that of Complete Suffrage; while one of Sturge's followers excited the wrath of the O'Connorites by the frank assertion that his party adopted Chartist principles but objected to Chartist leaders. Eventually the name of the Charter was retained; whereupon the Sturgeites withdrew from all association with a political party led by men, or rather by a man, whom they could not respect.

Their judgment as to the fate of the party if championed by O'Connor was amply justified. Owing to personal feuds, the remaining Chartist delegates speedily dwindled from more than three hundred to thirty-seven, who squabbled about the details of O'Connor's land

scheme. The chief's acrimony towards all who differed from him found vent in diatribes against his former devotee, Thomas Cooper, even during the two years' imprisonment which the Leicester leader suffered for his share in the recent disturbances. On the whole, Cooper was the gainer. O'Connor thenceforth lost the aid of his ablest remaining supporter; while Cooper, after composing in prison his remarkable poem, the *Purgatory of Suicides*, dedicated his great abilities almost solely to the cause of popular education, sharing with Henry Vincent the honours of the platform. As these two men lived mainly on the funds supplied by middle-class audiences, they were speedily scouted as renegades by the Chartist irreconcilables, and ceased to take any very active part in the movement.

Apparently, then, class jealousy was more powerful than all the efforts at conciliation; and the secret or openly expressed desires of the working-men levellers were too strong to admit any thorough co-operation with middle-class democrats like Joseph Sturge, who sought parliamentary reform only for the redress of the more glaring grievances of the age. But his efforts were not to be fruitless. Soured though they were by the disappointments of the year, Chartist working-men could not forget that the olive branch had been held out by prosperous business men like Sturge, Bright, and Cobden; and the reviving trade and prosperity of the next years reminded all keen-sighted artisans of the unity of interests which binds together employers and employed, and of the supreme importance of a just and wise system of taxation. The lesson was not lost.

While the remaining Chartist leaders were damaging their cause, the complete-suffrage party also lost ground. Having failed to unite the artisans and middle classes in a solid phalanx of reform, the Sturgeites began to be reabsorbed by the Anti-Corn-law League from which

they had emerged; and the defeat of Joseph Sturge at Birmingham in a three-cornered contest decided him to retire from active political life. His last sixteen years were unceasingly devoted to the extinction of slavery and the maintenance of peace principles. But his character and career told with effect far beyond these two spheres of work. In an age distracted by fierce class hatreds and a narrow devotion to the claims of party, the influence of Joseph Sturge's simple, manly character was distinctly elevating. His insistence on manhood suffrage was ever based on an unswerving religious belief, that only by treating every man as if he possessed the germs of noble character, could the grand possibilities of mankind be fitly developed. The intensity of this faith has inspired the following reference in Whittier's memorial lines—

> "Thanks for the good man's beautiful example,
> Who in the vilest saw
> Some sacred crypt or altar of a temple
> Still vocal with God's law".

Joseph Sturge did not live to see even the first instalment of democratic reform. He bequeathed his work to others, especially to Edward Miall, who up to the close of a long literary and parliamentary career struggled for complete suffrage on the same lofty principles. In 1851, when Carlyle's *Latter Day Pamphlets* gained a great vogue for the theory that a beneficent despotism was the best of all governments, Miall flinched not from attacking this "philosophy of the stick", even when wielded by the redoubtable seer of Chelsea. In an important public lecture he protested against the determined pessimism which regarded mankind as ever on the down-grade, unless tugged upwards by some heaven-sent genius. The need of this, as of all generations, exclaimed Miall, was not external compulsion, even by

a hero, but rather internal improvement. "Heroes are like stars, brilliant because the heavens are dark. Where the 'masses' are themselves enlightened and free, heroism ceases; and what would have shone forth effulgently becomes unnoticeable when all around is daylight." The chief moralizing influence in the life of a people, as in that of an individual, was not compulsion, but confidence. A class previously degraded almost to a slave's moral level could be restored to manliness and integrity by a bestowal of trust, which always evoked nobler feelings. As Rugby boys voted it a shame to lie to Arnold because he utterly trusted them, so the like feelings would, in course of time, be felt towards a government which treated its subjects as responsible citizens. "A higher system of government must be developed—one that relies less on laws and more on principles, less on force and more on the good-will of subjects. Safety will be found in the affectionate attachment of contented citizens."

Such was Miall's effective, if not brilliant, reply to Carlyle's vehement invectives against democracy. For the present the complete-suffrage movement made little headway, amid the material prosperity of the fifties and the distractions caused by the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny. But, as will be shown in chapters XI. and XIII., its aims were gradually to be realized after the delay which generally overclouds the first roseate hopes of speedy victory. In the interval an important work of class reconciliation had been quietly progressing, which, to all but Cassandra seers, robbed reform of its earlier terrors. That reconciliation dates from the year 1842, when the work of Joseph Sturge and Edward Miall, and the material prosperity inaugurated by Sir Robert Peel's financial reforms, began to assuage the class hatreds of the past, to close the era of revolutionary tumults, and to usher in a period of prolonged

and peaceful progress unparalleled in the history of any nation.

Chapter IX.

Revolution or Evolution?

It would be a refreshing change if some historian, reluctantly tearing himself away from official reports and diplomatic intrigues, would endeavour to gauge the influence of national recreation on national character. Possibly it is quite as potent as the struggles between the ins and the outs or the manœuvrings of rival diplomatists; for while the Olympians are weaving their mighty plans, the millions beneath are fashioning their characters alike in hours of toil and of recreation. The *café*, therefore, may claim the attention of the historical student as well as the council-chamber, the restaurant no less than the august debates of Westminster. How much of the heaviness of Georgian life, and the consequent stolidity of Georgian politics, was due to the full-bodied wine of Oporto which every patriotic Briton felt called upon to imbibe, to the exclusion of the wines of hostile Gaul, which were accused of promoting fickleness and instability? Who shall estimate the effect on the German of his light Rhenish or equally light beer, as contrasted with that of the heady ale drunk by his island cousin? What end is there to the social and political influence of the Continental *café* and the English ale-house? The potations of the Frenchman and German, even their quaffings of coffee—Lessing's "dear melancholy coffee which begets fancies"—so far from besotting the mind, actually favour the growth of thoughts; and thought, if it clashes with the actual, is the mother of revolution. In those countries, therefore, prosperity is by no means a barrier to discontent, because it tends to

stimulate the growth of ideas. In England, on the contrary, it has proved to be an infallible sedative from the days of Walpole to our own, because the expenditure of our lower classes then turns largely to a stimulant which dulls the brain. Who ever heard of any serious revolt concocted in an English ale-house? Is not that the abode of political stability, where John Bull, so long as he has money to spend, is wont to subside into thick-skinned, fuddled contentment in the best of all possible worlds?

The conditional clause is important. John Bull moneyless is the most persistent of malcontents, and even evolves political principles—always with an eye to future business. But when blest with beef and beer, his ideas are few, his contentment is colossal.

The history of English Radical reform therefore centres around periods of commercial depression and general misery, such as mark the almost unbroken series of lean years succeeding the great war, the sharp pinch of 1847–1848, the crash of 1866, and the long depression of trade and agriculture which set in after 1876. In the prosperous periods we have little to record except the unheeded utterances of reformers crying in a wilderness of plenty, or the quiet adoption by Conservatives of measures which they had previously vetoed as revolutionary. So complete is John Bull's faith in the steadying effect of beef and beer.

The future of Chartism was mainly to be determined by the economic condition of our working-classes, *i.e.* by the general condition of our industries. If these revived, and, consequently, if comfort replaced misery in the homes of our operatives, the movement which threatened to be revolutionary would naturally subside, remaining merely as a quietly propelling force in the direction of parliamentary reform. Such was the momentous "condition-of-England question" which claimed

the attention of every thinking man. Above all, Thomas Carlyle had proved that Chartism was not solely a political movement, but was quite as much a "knife and fork question". It had long been clear that the popular discontent was due mainly to low wages, irregular work, and high prices; and some men had perceived the tolerably obvious connection between bad trade and the burdens of a stupid system of taxation. In words which then seemed prophetic, William Cobbett had foretold that the effect of the awful burdens bequeathed by the great war would be to accelerate the march of democracy by arousing indignation against the policy which, after recklessly amassing the national debt, allowed it to fetter the limbs of industry. The whole course of the democratic movement in our land testified to the accuracy of the surmise; and it was not until Sir Robert Peel readjusted the financial burdens that stability was restored alike to our industries, our society, and our institutions.

No statesman of this century has exerted so potent an influence in harmonizing conflicting interests, and in adapting party methods to new conditions, as Sir Robert Peel. It was due very largely to his foresight and common sense that the Tory party in 1841 came back to power, only nine years after it appeared to have been for ever extinguished by the first Reform Bill. The very magnitude of that disaster had enabled Peel to broaden the basis of the party by insisting that its mission thenceforth was to rally the newly enfranchised, as far as possible, to the support of our ancient institutions. His followers accepted the situation with an adaptability born of defeat, and enhanced by hope of future recovery; and the party which returned to power in 1841 had little in common with the "ignorant and obstinate faction" whose approaching overthrow Greville had, ten years previously, hailed with satisfaction.

The newly styled Conservative party now dominated the situation; but, fortunately for its further usefulness, Peel dominated the party, thereby continuing the educational process which his malicious detractor, Disraeli, was subsequently to carry to unheard-of lengths. Peel's mental endowments were curiously characteristic of the sturdy Lancashire stock whence he sprang. The Peels of Peel Fold, near Bury, were an honoured family of the yeoman class; but with all the toughness of the farmer, the father of the statesman showed keen foresight and business capacity in mortgaging his estate so as to embark in the more profitable pursuit of calico-printing, then in the heyday of its early prosperity. This change from bucolic to mercantile pursuits curiously foreshadows the mental and political development of the son, who was brought by stress of circumstances to abandon nearly all the tenets of his early days. Beginning his official career as a colleague of the Liverpools and Castlereaghs, Sir Robert Peel was to end his days as a convert to the Manchester school. The sincerity of the change can be questioned only by pessimists, or by cranks who rate rigid consistency above a nation's anguish. Peel could resist tenaciously as long as his political creed was undergirded by conviction; but, that gone, the antique framework of his mind gave way beneath the first exceptional strain. Even in 1842 Peel was practically a Free-trader. In his famous budget speech of that year he admitted the cogency of the arguments for free exchange, striving, however, to mollify the Tory squires by declaring that corn was an exception to the general rule, owing to the danger of national dependence on foreigners for food-supply.

Contenting himself with a reduction of the sliding-scale duties on corn, he turned his attention to our complex tariff, which certainly needed attention. It imposed duties on some 1200 articles—a system which was disas-

trous to the nation's finance, and to the manufacturers and operatives who formed the backbone of the nation. The failure of Whig financiers in 1837–41 to wring sufficient funds out of a multitude of niggling little customs and excise duties might well have convinced every observer that our taxation had been inherently absurd. Readers of Adam Smith knew that our fiscal system violated his sound canon of finance, that the best form of taxation was that which takes from the people as little as possible over and above what it brings into the public treasury. The lessons which students learnt from the father of political economy had been borne in on manufacturers by enormous stocks of unsaleable goods and on operatives by the bitter experience of an empty larder. Indeed the Radical clubs—notably those of Leeds and Birmingham—had frequently petitioned for the repeal of all taxes which pressed on the workers. Doubtless Peel's action in substituting direct for indirect taxation was dictated rather by regard for the maxims of political economy than for the demands of Radical clubs; but the constant preoccupation of his mind with the condition of our working-classes, which Guizot notes as his dominant characteristic, may well have strengthened his determination to recur to the policy adopted with such wondrous results by the younger Pitt towards the close of the eighteenth century. His inspiring appeal to the House to revert to that potent fiscal instrument, the income-tax, to which their forefathers had "submitted with buoyant vigour and universal applause when threatened by the might of revolutionary France", was conceived in the happiest spirit of Conservative oratory; and yet its practical results were to be the gradual undermining of that protective system of which Peel had been the accredited champion. The imposition of an income-tax of sevenpence in the £, in place of a multitude of customs and excise duties, was soon seen to be

a most beneficent experiment, restoring order to our finances and prosperity to our languishing industries and commerce. After a trial of three years, Peel persuaded his party to prolong the experiment for a similar period; and let in 430 more articles duty free, besides remitting the imposts on glass, cotton, wool, &c. The increased prosperity of the country under the new system had undermined Peel's belief in the expediency of "protection" in any shape or form; but it was reserved for the rain-storms of the autumn of 1845 to inundate the last water-tight compartment of his brain. When two millions of Irish were in risk of starvation, he saw it to be not only a folly but a crime to hinder the importation of cheap corn; and millions, not only of Irish, but also of Britons, soon blessed the statesman who, at the sacrifice of consistency, gave the people cheap bread.[1]

With the details of these important fiscal changes we are not here concerned, but rather with their results on the people's welfare, and on that reconciliation between the middle and lower classes which in 1842 seemed far distant. After the beginning of the long war with France the trend of prices had pressed heavily on our people. In the years 1792–1813 the rise of prices, due almost entirely to war, had been nearly 70 per cent; and, despite a slight fall after the peace, the old level had never been reached.[2]

At the risk of repeating what has been previously stated, a brief review of the operatives' position must

[1] In the budget of 1846 Peel also admitted foreign sugar on the same terms as colonial sugar, abolishing those preferential rates for free-grown sugar on which the abolitionists had insisted. For an account of the Free Trade struggle, see *Free Trade and its Results*, by G. Armitage Smith, M.A., in this series.

[2] Mr. Lowe in his *Present State of England* (1823) estimates the annual expenses of a rural labourer's family of $5\frac{1}{8}$ persons as follows:—1792, £27; 1813, £48; 1823, £32.

here be hazarded, if we would understand the magnitude of the benefits wrought by the change. In the thirty years succeeding the war, the workmen were victims to almost every possible adverse circumstance. The factory system was slowly grinding out hand-labour; and yet the new wholesale methods could not produce their natural and ultimately beneficial results of cheapening commodities, owing to the dearness of raw materials. The manufacturer, when pressed by foreign competition, looked to the cheapening of labour as the natural set-off to the dearness of his raw materials; and the vast growth of our population gave him almost limitless opportunities of effecting economies in his human machinery. The law did not fully recognize trade-unions; and the new facilities of migration opened up by the Poor-law of 1834 and by railways, deluged the market with unskilled labour. And while wages were thus depressed with the tacit connivance of the legislature, the prices of the necessaries of life were raised by a fiscal system which seemed devised so as to hamper the energies of the trader and empty the larder of the poor man. Such was the economic cause of the discontent which found vent in Chartism.

The removal of the irritant soon produced the natural result. With cheap raw materials, and with industry unhampered by the visits of the excise officer, commerce began to forge ahead; and manufacturers soon discovered that they reaped from the cheapness of raw wool and cotton far greater benefit than from low wages, which impaired the efficiency of the human machinery.

British workmen, however, were benefited not only by increasing regularity of employment and a gradual rise in wages, but by the cheapening of many necessaries of life. The evidence on this subject collected by Mr. David Chadwick is very striking. From careful inquiries made among the operatives of Lancashire, he

found that the average expenses of a working-man with a wife and three children were as follows:—

	1839.	1849.	1859.	1887.
Bread, flour, &c., ...	7/6	5/8	5/4	4/8¾
Groceries, &c., ...	7/9½	6/1½	5/11	4/3

Other items, such as butcher's-meat, clothes, and vegetables, showed very slight reductions, while rent and milk increased.[1] But Mr. Chadwick adds his testimony to those of many others as to the general improvement in the material condition of operatives not only in Lancashire but throughout Great Britain. The fact must be admitted by the most jaundiced croaker, if he will contrast the present condition of Birmingham, Glasgow, and the east end of London with that portrayed in the gloomy pages of Frederick Engels' *Condition of the Labouring Classes in England in 1844*.[2]

That gifted writer so far underestimated the effects of Sir Robert Peel's economic reforms as confidently to prophesy the imminence of a social revolution in England. Certainly the outlook was still ominous. The desperate strikes of 1842 were succeeded in 1844 by a bitter struggle between masters and men in the northern colliery districts, which left the men defeated but defiant, and enrolled 30,000 of them as physical-force Chartists. The year 1845 brought new troubles. It was the year of the railway bubble and of the potato famine. Never since the days of the South Sea Bubble did so much money change hands on schemes so risky and baseless; and had all the £600,000,000 of proposed capital been

[1] For fuller details see Mr. D. Chadwick's papers read to the Statistical Society in December, 1859, to the British Association in 1861 and in 1887. He places the average increase of the wages of Lancashire operatives in the period 1850–1883 as only 10 per cent. Others reckon the increase as 35 per cent or even more.

[2] In the preface to the 1892 edition of this able work, the author, while still waving the red flag, admits that improvement had taken place, especially in the east of London.

really subscribed, the collapse of most of the schemes would have been a national disaster. As it was, the for once over-imaginative *bourgeoisie* sustained terrible losses; and that too in an autumn when the potato-rot might have counselled prudence. The locking up of so much money in railway enterprises, and the purchase of vast supplies of foreign corn to feed the starving Irish and make up the deficiency of the British food-supplies, naturally produced a tightness of money which culminated in the financial crisis of 1847. Amidst the consequent distress, which though temporary was severe, the physical-force Chartists had their last chance of effecting a forcible change in the constitution. The years 1847–48 are therefore of considerable interest. To superficial observers it seemed that the current was again setting in towards revolution, as it undoubtedly was on the Continent. Or was the movement of the waters here due merely to winds which agitated the surface but left the volume of the current still sweeping forward with unimpeded force?

Judging from present signs, the United Kingdom was in a perilous state. Ireland was palpitating with misery and disaffection. In the general election of August, 1847, advanced Radicals secured several seats, Feargus O'Connor gaining a conspicuous triumph at Nottingham. In truth he was now at the height of his popularity, owing to the successful floating of his land scheme for the multiplication of cottier properties, and that too in spite of the determined opposition of Cooper and many other Chartists. In spite of discords among the leaders, Chartism seemed to gain power over the unemployed, even before the dawn of the year of revolutions which seemed to promise a speedy victory for democracy all along the line.

Man is a gregarious creature; and even though the condition of England differed enormously, as will pre-

sently appear, from that of Italy, France, and Germany, yet Chartism seemed to gain new aggressive force when in the early months of 1848 news arrived of the overthrow of most of the continental dynasties. First in Sicily, then in other Italian cities oppressed by Austrian or domestic tyranny, the torch of revolution flared up; then, speeding over the Alps, it consumed what appeared to be the most stable dynasty on the Continent, that of the House of Orleans. In quick succession the flames burst forth in the chief cities of Germany and Austria, the famous repressive system of Metternich proving to be merely a carefully planned "set piece", along which the democratic powder fizzed and crackled with most effect wherever the forces of tyranny had seemed to be most overwhelming. These events naturally produced a profound effect on English democratic opinion. When Louis Philippe, King of the French, escaped out of Paris in a cab; when Metternich, after controlling the destinies of Central and Southern Europe, was fain to flee from Vienna in a washerwoman's cart; when Italian Dukes and German translucencies hastily granted democratic constitutions, to petition for which had recently been a sure passport to the dungeon, could not a monster demonstration of the men of London force the Charter on a trembling and penitent Parliament? Such were the illusory hopes which produced the final recrudescence of physical-force Chartism and led up to the fiasco of April 10. In England a cab was to be the doom, not of the monarch, but of the Chartist petition.

A kindly Providence hid this issue of events from the gaze of the enthusiastic Radicals who planned the coercion of Parliament. For a time the agitation proceeded briskly, vast meetings being held on Blackheath and Kennington Commons, as also at Peep Green in Yorkshire, and at Oldham Edge. Once more a National

Petition for the People's Charter received myriads of signatures, with significant hints that it was the last that would be sent to the House of Commons as at present constituted. "If they reject this, we'll go to work"—such was the determination expressed in many a town. Again delegates were elected to a National Convention; and this people's parliament, which seemed to threaten the august body at Westminster, assembled in London on April 4th, 1848, to plan a vast demonstration on behalf of the Charter. April 10th was the date fixed for this event—"ten days too late" was the sarcastic comment of Sanders Mackay, who in Kingsley's immortal story represents the best elements of moral-force Chartism.

Meanwhile the authorities had not been idle. The Duke of Wellington, entrusted with the command of the troops garrisoning London, held large forces in reserve, while others were massed at the Tower, the Bank of England, and other points. Keeping most of the troops out of sight, the authorities depended mainly on the impression created by an overwhelming force of special constables, of whom 150,000 or more were enrolled. Among them was Prince Louis Napoleon, who, before that mad year had run its course, was to leap on the shoulders of the French democracy as Prince President of the French Republic.

In our land the government was strong enough to resist the forcible encroachments of the mob, or the insidious assaults of the "heir to the revolution". In France the Orleans dynasty received no active support from the middle classes, the upper stratum of which only enjoyed electoral rights; and it met with a dogged resistance from the artisans, whose claims it had persistently disregarded. In England, on the other hand, the middle classes had been pacified by the abolition of the Corn-laws; and their spokesmen, Cobden and Bright, at the

last meeting of the famous League, had expressed not only their devotion to the crown, but even a mild approval of the action of the House of Lords in ratifying the verdict of the House of Commons. "Above all," said John Bright, in a passage which evoked loud cheers, "the people have learned that the way to freedom is henceforward not through violence and bloodshed." The working-classes in England had yet one more illustration of this important truth in the peaceful victory which crowned the efforts of Mr. Fielden and Lord Shaftesbury to reduce the hours of factory work to ten a day for women and young persons—a change which was to take effect on May 1, 1848. When two such boons as cheap bread and shorter hours of labour were peacefully obtained from Parliament, what need was there forcibly to change its composition? The lessons of the past and present obviously counselled prudence and patience. To this cause, and not to any inherent difference in the nature of the peoples themselves, are we to attribute the self-restraint of London artisans in 1848, as contrasted with the vehemence of their brethren in Italy, France, and Germany. When the more reckless of the Chartists boasted of the imminent overthrow of the British government, they ranted to artisans who were mainly apathetic; while a sprinkling of zealots, along with hobbledehoys and thieves, alone cheered for the coming revolution. As for the threats of French and Irish assistance, nothing tended more to send sensible workmen to their homes, and bring into the streets every householder to serve as a special constable; so that physical-force Chartism, at the crisis, found itself confronted by a crushing superiority of force. This was the dominant fact of the situation on April 10.

Another item in the programme also portended, not tragedy, but burlesque. Feargus O'Connor, as has been previously noted, amid all his apparently reckless rhetoric

about death or glory, took care to intersperse numerous saving clauses; and by many of his former partisans he had already been charged with cowardice for not acting up to the level of his inflammatory harangues. He could, however, assert in his own defence that he had never really advised revolt if it appeared hopeless; and now, when the government privately intimated that a monster procession to Westminster would be resisted, he prepared to cover his retreat by a well-worn device, a display of oratorical squibs. Conscious of impending failure, O'Connor and some other prominent delegates, among whom were Ernest Jones and Julian Harney, stepped into the triumphal car, which, with another gaily-decked chariot conveying the monster petition, headed the procession. Filing along through the city, and over Blackfriars Bridge, the petitioners arrived at Kennington Common, where O'Connor was called aside and warned by the commissioner of police that the procession must not cross Westminster Bridge. Returning to the car, the perplexed leader harangued the expectant crowd of some 30,000 persons, who represented the militant democracy of the metropolis. He informed them that he had spent six sleepless nights, that his breast was like a coal of fire, that his land scheme would shower countless blessings on them, and that he could not spare one man from the feast. He therefore besought them not to force a way over Westminster Bridge, but to allow their executive committee alone to accompany the petition to Parliament, where he would die upon the floor of the House, or get them their rights. The surprised crowd, which had expected to be led by its champion to death or glory, was cajoled into good-humour by these assurances; and few attempted to force a passage across the bridge against the truncheons of the constables. The triumphal cars also remained on the unprivileged shore of the river, and the giant petition itself was carried in

a cab to St. Stephens, where it was greeted with shouts of derisive laughter. Thus did the Chartist "Mountain" bring forth its mouse.

The ridicule aroused by the tame result of so much braggadocio was increased when it was found that the giant petition contained not 5,000,000, but less than 2,000,000 signatures, many of which were palpable forgeries, such as Flatnose, Punch, Colonel Sibthorpe, Prince Albert, and Victoria *Rex*. Failure and ridicule produced the usual crop of recriminations among the Chartist leaders, the more determined men, such as Harney and Ernest Jones, bitterly inveighing against the cowardice of O'Connor. Amidst these disputes the National Convention dwindled away; and the relics of physical-force Chartism were dispersed after two or three vain attempts at sedition in the summer months, attempts which had the sole effect of leading to prison those who had taken too seriously the bluster of the physical-force leaders.

But for the extraordinary successes of French, Italian, and German democrats in the spring it is questionable whether physical-force Chartism would ever have raised its head in 1848. It was a rather artificial imitation of the recent demonstrations of continental democrats, which had terrorized the governments at Naples, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna. The events of the time served to reveal to the world the stability of British institutions as contrasted with the inherent weakness of continental despotisms. The lesson was well learnt by Englishmen; and ultimately it was to bear fruit across the Channel.

Such was the end of the revolutionary stage of English Radicalism. The imprisonment of its more zealous advocates at London and in Lancashire, and the pitiful squabbles of its remaining leaders soon divested the movement of all practical importance. Instead of following the course of its decline, we may more profitably

notice the relation of the movement to latter-day Radicalism. That veteran champion of financial reform, Mr. Hume, in May, 1849, started a movement for obtaining further remissions of taxation for the working-classes;[1] and even O'Connor gave his support to men whom he had previously denounced as selfish *bourgeois*.

But Hume was not the first to agitate for a stringently democratic reform in our taxation. He was anticipated by William Lovett, who added to his past services to the working-classes by founding a People's League on the ruins of physical-force Chartism. Seeing that the agitation for a drastic electoral reform had fallen into disrepute, Lovett urged the need of further changes in taxation. Peel's income-tax had already placed financial burdens on the broadest and strongest backs. Lovett proposed entirely to free weak backs from those burdens, which were to fall exclusively on the wealthy. In the forefront of its programme the People's League demanded the complete repeal of all taxes imposed on food and on the materials or processes of industry. In a word, it proposed the complete abolition of all indirect taxation, and the substitution of a direct tax on property, graduated according to the wealth of the possessor. This, as far as I have been able to find, is the first appearance of this demand as a "plank" in the democratic platform. The claim, it is true, had previously been urged by Mazzini in his Young Europe Association, and had found a place among the speculations of that inflexible disciple of Robespierre, the fanatical young St. Just. But Lovett was the first to embody it firmly in an English political programme. This is not the place to discuss either its

[1] On June 31, 1848, Hume also brought forward a motion for household suffrage, the ballot, triennial Parliaments, and the approximate equalization of electoral areas to population. He stated that five out of every six adult males were without votes. The motion was defeated by 351 to 84.

In 1851 Mr. Locke King's motion, the first of the kind, for the assimilation of the borough and county franchise, was defeated by 299 to 83.

justice or its feasibility. Derived by Mazzini from the reds of the first French Republic, it remained a mere opinion, until the success of Peel's experiments in 1842–1848 seems to have impelled Lovett to give it the first place in the new Radical creed, where it still holds a prominent place.

Another link connecting Chartism with more recent developments was the endeavour of O'Connor and some associates to bring about a union of various democratic clubs in the *National Charter and Social Reform Union.* The title is significant. It seemed to admit that the Charter alone could scarcely lead democrats to victory. The schism caused by the fiasco of April 10, 1848, was too deep to be healed, unless new sources of enthusiasm diverted attention from the personal disputes of the past. O'Connor had always had a leaning towards social experiments, and he now proposed that the new union should undertake to support the co-operative movements and similar efforts for the improvement of artisan life. Had he not been naturally suspected by many genuine co-operators, possibly the new industrial movement might have marched hand in hand with reviving Chartism. It was not to be. The distrust felt in O'Connor was now redoubled, owing to the failure of his Land Company in a way which exposed him to merciless charges of dishonesty from his former colleagues, Ernest Jones and Harney. This last blow was fatal alike to his waning reputation and to his tottering reason. The closing scenes of the great agitator's life were not devoid of pathos, as when the cottiers on the Land Company's estate at O'Connorville presented him an address of sympathy and thanks for his agrarian efforts; or when, at the greeting accorded to Kossuth, the great Hungarian patriot, in 1851, the still stalwart Irishman ran up to the illustrious visitor on the platform and wrung his hand with maudlin effusiveness. Failing in his Land Company,

losing control over his *Northern Star*, and bankrupt in reputation, O'Connor sank to rest in a private lunatic asylum. The fleeting nature of the popularity which he had striven to gain and to hold was revealed by two suggestive facts. A national subscription commenced by the men of Nottingham realized only £32 for the man who, during the first eleven years of the reign, had been the idol of the populace; and that once formidable paper, the *Northern Star*, after being bought by its former printers for £100, forthwith advised Radicals to abandon the terms Charter and Chartist as "offensive both to sight and taste", and to concentrate their efforts on gaining universal suffrage and the ballot.

The general despair felt by Chartists (except by such stalwarts as Ernest Jones and Harney), and the collapse of O'Connor's social programme, left the ground free for a far healthier influence, that of Maurice, Kingsley, and the school of Christian socialists. Amidst the excitements of the spring of 1848, and the disappointments which ensued, these two earnest leaders, by voice and pen, had striven to point the way to self-help as a safer, if less exciting, road than that of blustering demonstrations; and their manly counsels, reinforced by those of "Tom Hughes", soon strengthened the hold which co-operation was gaining over the artisans of the Midlands and the North. There was indeed every need to encourage and guide the great co-operative movement, so that it might realize the highest aims of its founders, who looked not to thrift alone, but also to the cultivation of the social virtues, and to the training of that corporate spirit in which the British workmen were so lamentably deficient. No thinking man could study the events of 1840–1850 without seeing that the failure of Chartism was due to the obstinate egotism both of leaders and of the rank and file. *Quot homines tot sententiæ* may be written as the motto of the movement, especially after each of the

rebuffs which the agitators encountered. How necessary, then, for artisans to learn on a smaller scale, and in their own community, the need of that "give and take", of that self-restraint and patience in adversity, which lubricates human society, and renders steady progress possible. Such was, surely, the chief practical lesson interwoven by Kingsley with the plot of his Chartist novel, *Alton Locke*. That there might be no mistake as to his meaning, he pointed his moral by reminding his readers in the preface to the second edition that democracy meant, not the rule of mere numbers, but of a people organized in *demoi*, in communities; that is, of a people vitally related by community of spirit. The rule of mere numbers, he asserted, would result in that worst of all tyrannies, an ochlocracy, or mob-rule. His warnings, together with those of Maurice and Tom Hughes, derived additional force from their well-known sympathy with many of the Chartist aims, a sympathy which found expression in manly words of advice and cheering counsel in meetings, where rage at past failures seemed to portend final despairing efforts. Thanks to this noble trio, the desultory efforts of the Chartists were largely absorbed by the trade-union and co-operative movements, which had already begun to ameliorate the workmen's position. In the latter of these, at any rate, they learned something of that corporate spirit, and of "the obedience and self-control which it brings", together with the lesson, so repugnant to John Bull's individualism, that "only he who can obey is fit to rule".

Such is a brief outline of the events determining the course of democracy in England in the closing years of the revolutionary period. The agitations which had burst forth on the Continent in 1789 seemed to be for ever suppressed by the complete failures of French, Italian, German, and Hungarian democrats to rear lasting political structures in the exciting years 1848–1849.

The earlier phases of continental democracy undoubtedly exercised a potent influence on English Radicalism in the days of Horne Tooke and Tom Paine, and later on imparted to our reform movement of 1830–1832 the *élan* needful for victory. But since that time the influence of the Continent on British politics has steadily declined. The reason is not far to seek. The democratic movements of Italy and Germany, which caused most of the unrest of the Continent in 1830–1849, while aiming secondarily at civic rights, were mainly inspired by a longing for national unity and independence of external control. They therefore had little in common with Chartism, which, as we have seen, derived its strength from distress due to economic causes. English democracy has necessarily been both insular and practical, because it has been overshadowed by the sudden growth of economic problems, unparalleled in the history of the world. These problems were being in part solved by factory legislation and fiscal changes at the very time when national claims produced the political explosions of 1848 on the Continent. The imitation by Chartists of continental revolutionary methods was therefore utterly futile, arraying against them here that force of public opinion which at Rome, Milan, Paris, Berlin, and Vienna had enthusiastically greeted the dawn of democracy. The verdict of posterity, however, will probably award to Feargus O'Connor and his associates some scanty meed of praise for unintentionally revealing the strength of British institutions, when despotism and unbridled democracy reduced the Continent to a weltering chaos.

Chapter X.

Phases of Political Thought.

As the biting winds of spring often render good service by checking a premature growth of vegetation, so the sharp reaction which in and after 1849 blighted the ardent hopes of democrats, was to be ultimately fruitful in good. Alike in the United Kingdom and on the Continent, important divisions in aim and method, which were not realized amidst the enthusiasm of the attack, were made patent by the failure to snatch victory by a *coup de main*. The disheartened hosts, falling back in confusion, revised their methods, discarded untrustworthy leaders, strove to quicken the popular intelligence, and sought, when possible, the alliance of monarchs or statesmen who sympathized with the aspirations of their peoples. The Cannæ of 1848 evidently called for a Fabian policy of prudence and delay. It was to be rewarded by signal good fortune, the peoples of Italy and Germany finding in each case their patriotic king and statesman; while in England the cloak of Sir Robert Peel was to fall on an equally gifted successor. These are the chief facts in modern democratic developments, tending not only to assuage revolutionary passion, but to invigorate and solidify the monarchical principle.

In our own land, the swing of the pendulum, first towards extreme democracy, and then back towards old methods of government, was not so violent as on the Continent, doubtless owing to the long practice of a great part of our people in representative government, and the sense of responsibility and moderation which it develops. Nevertheless, English politics felt not only the influence of the events of 1848, but also of the reactionary period which followed. Indeed, in 1850–1866,

British democracy relapsed into a condition almost of torpor when contrasted with the phenomenal activity of the two preceding decades. So remarkable was the change that a well-known Liberal statesman exclaimed in 1858: "The time is coming when we shall have to advertise for a grievance". The saying betrayed little foresight; but it illustrates the complacent optimism of a period dominated by the personality of Palmerston. How different had been the condition of our life and thought twenty years previously, when the prevalence of discontent drew from that typical Tory of the old school, Lord Eldon, the unparliamentary asseveration, that, if he had to begin life over again, he would begin as an agitator! By contrasting the two statements, we may measure the enormous influence of the work of social and financial reform carried out in the interval.

There were many influences tending to pacify the working-classes of Great Britain besides the collapse of revolutionary efforts in 1848. The gold discoveries of 1849–1851 in California and Australia gave an enormous impetus to industry and commerce. The iron horse and the steamship, working in harmonious combination, were opening up all parts of the world to emigration with a cheapness and facility never dreamt of in 1837; and every ship-load of emigrants leaving our shores helped to relieve the pressure of population on congested districts, and to prepare the way for an economic solution of the "condition-of-England question". It is true that the many Chartists, and still more the thousands of Irish malcontents, who sought homes beyond the seas, embittered our relations with our colonies, and still more with the United States. But the discontent at any rate passed from the sphere of domestic politics to that of imperial and foreign policy.

Besides this cause of relief to our overwrought social system, there were the distractions caused by a remark-

able series of wars and commotions, from the Crimean War and Indian Mutiny to the great national struggles of Italy and Germany in 1859–1866, and the complications resulting from the American Civil War. *Inter arma silent leges*, says the Roman proverb. It holds good in modern times in more ways than one. A practical people like the English thinks but of one thing at a time; and when public attention was riveted on the events at Sevastopol or Lucknow, on the tremendous struggles of North and South, or on the future destinies of Italy, Prussia, and Austria, little energy was left for questions of parliamentary reform. The one commanding personality in the English politics of that age was also adverse to any change in the electorate. Lord Palmerston used his powers of racy speech and dogged will to discourage all motions for reform, and diverted public attention as far as possible to foreign or imperial affairs and to questions of national defence. From the time of his famous "Civis Romanus sum" speech in 1850 to his decease in 1865, foreign politics accordingly held in popular esteem the position claimed in preceding years by domestic questions. The alternation of these two phases of political life has been one of the characteristics of British development, and will probably recur no less decisively in the future. Whenever the United Kingdom has fallen into a state of *malaise*, the electorate has insisted on the postponement of all save the most pressing considerations of colonial and foreign policy. But when the mitigation of social evils or political discontent has reinvigorated the life-blood of the empire's heart, a dilatation or expansion of effort towards the extremities becomes natural and inevitable. After the exhausting efforts which culminated at Waterloo, a long period of torpor in imperial affairs inevitably supervened, until the recuperative process, wisely directed by Lord Grey and Sir Robert Peel, enabled the mother of nations to send

forth her swarms of emigrants to occupy the lands which the prowess of her warriors or the genius of her engineers had opened up. The marvellous growth of our colonies in the new era of commercial expansion awakened both our own national pride and the jealousies of our rivals, and thus tended to discredit the views of the "Manchester School", which regarded colonies as a burden, and foreign policy as a delusion and a snare. In truth, however, both the Cobdens and the Palmerstons exert a useful influence on a people which seeks to combine vigour and liberty at home with political and commercial influence abroad. Without her Cobdens, Peels, and Gladstones, Great Britain might possibly have degenerated into a second Carthage. Without her Pitts, Palmerstons, and Beaconsfields, she might have fallen to the level of the Dutch Netherlands.

Such have been the chief material causes affecting the ebb and flow of English political life. But a wider question here meets us. Is there any connection between the peaceful expansion of the English-speaking peoples and the political thought of the middle of this century? It may be of interest to notice certain influences which the expansion of England has exerted on contemporary thought both in our own and in other countries. The marvellous growth of the English-speaking peoples has been so prominent a feature of modern life, that it could hardly be overlooked either by the politicians or thinkers on the Continent. I shall try to show that the steady growth of British institutions has helped to divert the attention of political thinkers from abstract speculation to patent facts, from the drawing up of paper constitutions to a study of the development of British institutions and of their famous offshoots in the New World.

A century had elapsed since Montesquieu had extolled our system of balance of political powers as combining

the peculiar excellences of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy in a compromise which possessed the elements of stability. This balance of powers in our constitution was, it is true, vanishing under the encroachments of the people's House on the prerogatives of the Crown and of the House of Lords. But, it might be argued, these changes in our political customs and procedure were, after all, only the legal recognition of changes which had occurred, and were still occurring, in the life of the people. They served to register the stages of transition from the monarchical and feudal times to the present industrial age, which endows the many with an overwhelming importance. The Act of 1832 and subsequent legislation, when viewed in relation to the momentous developments of the nation's life, proved that the English constitution was, what it had always been, an organic growth vitally related to the body politic, and therefore necessarily expanding in the direction indicated by the most vigorous growth.

But besides possessing this feature of interest, our institutions claimed the study of political thinkers on yet wider grounds. The development of the English race beyond the seas was to demonstrate the marvellous adaptability of our methods of government to widely diverse conditions. Whatever may be urged as to the many differences between the constitution of the United States and that of the mother country, there can be little doubt as to the British origin of most of the provisions of that famous federal compact. It was this democratic offshoot of British constitutional life, applied to a number of self-governing communities, which engaged the earnest attention of that brilliant French thinker, de Tocqueville. His great work, *Democracy in America* (1835), was destined, as we shall presently see, to exert a salutary influence on political thought in Europe; and on no leader of public opinion was the impress of his

vigorous mind stamped more clearly than on John Stuart Mill, who justly calls him the Montesquieu of the age. In truth, de Tocqueville's great work tended to recall political thought from the sphere of abstract speculation, in which it had aimlessly careered since the advent of Rousseau, to a careful use of the comparative method in which the earlier French thinker had excelled. Observation, comparison, and analysis of existing institutions have tended since de Tocqueville's day to resume their rightful ascendency in political thought.

Another testimony to the vitality of the English constitution was seen in its adaptation to the needs of the two discordant provinces of Canada. After the revolts of 1837 a careful inquiry was made into the conditions of political life in Upper and Lower Canada. As a result, the Canada Act of 1840 granted full constitutional rights to these provinces, which were thenceforth united for all save local requirements, the governor appointed by the Crown continuing to discharge all, and more than all, the functions wielded by the sovereign at home. The almost complete success of this experiment afforded indisputable proof of the surprising pliability of our institutions, and tended still further to give a practical turn to the political thought of the age.

Not only practical men like the Piedmontese statesman Cavour, but the foremost political thinkers of Europe, were now convinced that if representative government was to be securely gained by continental peoples, it must be of a character somewhat akin to that of England. In brief, the democratic ideals of Rousseau or of Bentham gave place to those of de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill.

Even before the failure of revolutionary methods in 1848–49, there had been noticeable a certain hesitation in the utterances even of ardent reformers. Was democracy the true solution of all difficulties besetting the

political relations of mankind? Was it the *summum bonum* of all public effort? And if so, were the people endowed with the qualities necessary to its successful working? Such doubts had scarcely ever troubled the minds of its first champions. They are the commonplaces of all works written since 1830 by open-minded observers, except those of the lone-brooding seer, Mazzini, and of the diminishing band of disciples who were still entranced by the vision of *Young Italy* and *Young Europe*. The Mazzinians remained as almost the sole witnesses to the unquestioning faith of the earlier generation, when Rousseau assumed as an indisputable fact the equality of man and the supremacy and infallibility of the general will.

The contrast between the earlier age and the middle and latter part of this century is so marked, that a few suggestions seem to be called for as to the trend of thought from the days of Rousseau, the unconscious precursor of revolutionary thought, down to the time of Mill and Darwin. Nothing can be more absolute than the dogmatism with which Rousseau builds up his ideal democratic system. The people, having agreed by a solemn social compact to form a community for purposes of mutual defence, support, and advancement, forthwith create a state, wherein the general will, as declared directly by the people itself, without the intervention of representatives, is paramount. Such a community or state having been formed by the writer with idyllic ease, Rousseau next deduces the attributes of the general will. Arguing with fallacious facility from adjective to adjective, he proves that as the will is general it must also be inalienable, indivisible, incorruptible, unrepresentable, and indestructible.[1] Such an argument would of itself inspire distrust in the present age of dis-

[1] Rousseau, *Le Contrat Social* (1774), bk. ii. An English edition has recently been edited by Mr. Tozer, with introduction.

illusionment; but the literary skill of the writer and the symmetry of his completed system constituted at once the charm and the danger of the new political evangel to the men of 1789 in France, and even to the more practical Horne Tookes and Tom Paines on this side of the Channel. And all this, it should be observed, was derived by verbal legerdemain from the first postulate of Rousseau's political geometry, the assumed *social contract*, from which our own thinker, Hobbes, had deduced the justice and necessity of an absolute monarchy. What wonder that Burke called Rousseau's book, and the resulting declaration of the rights of man of 1789, "chaff and rags and paltry blurred sheets of paper about the rights of man"! A dreary, bloody interval was, however, to elapse before thinkers ceased to delude mankind by their logical Utopias, and, returning to solid fact, recognized that politics was an experimental science.

The conviction of the absolute truth of the democratic creed and of its superiority to all other theories of government was asserted with undiminished fervour by another great political thinker of that age, Jeremy Bentham. Approaching his subject by methods of inquiry, based on a careful analysis of forms of government and of the motives of human action, the Englishman nevertheless arrived at conclusions well-nigh as sweeping as those of Rousseau.[1] Scorning the system of checks and balances which endeared the British constitution to Montesquieu, Bentham advocated an unbridled democracy. The monarchy and the House of Lords were therefore to vanish, yielding their powers to a House of Commons elected by universal suffrage, which was to enforce absolutely the will of the majority not only in legislation but by the most complete and exacting control over the executive departments of government.

[1] See ch. ii. of this work.

"He exhausted" (says John Stuart Mill[1]) "all the resources of ingenuity in devising means for riveting the yoke of public opinion closer and closer round the necks of all public functionaries, and excluding every possibility of the slightest or most temporary influence either by a minority or by the functionary's own notions of right." To such a length did Bentham's enthusiasm for utility carry him in the very natural disgust at the sordid Whig oligarchy of the times of Walpole and the Pelhams and the monarchical state-craft of George III. The arbitrariness of the new democratic government is not the only noticeable feature in Bentham's scheme. Equally remarkable is the baldness and rigidity of its presentment. The utilitarian philosopher urged his claims with complete disregard of historical associations and human sentiment. Great, indeed, must have been the potential vigour of his leading ideas to have made many converts, when set forth in a garb so unattractive and even repellent. "Victorious analysis" menaced mankind with a form of democracy which would have merited Burke's crushing criticism, a "multiplied tyranny". We seem to picture Bentham's triumphant democracy as reducing the world to a state resembling that described by astronomers, when our planet was a cheerless expanse of waters sweeping in tidal waves that were checked and diverted by no friendly continents. Such would be the flux and reflux of Bentham's all-dominating democratic opinion.

The experience of the successive spasms of revolution in 1789–1799, the return to a military despotism under the great Napoleon, and the failure of the French Revolution of 1830, discredited the rigid systems of Rousseau and Bentham. Talleyrand's *mot* on taking the oath to the constitution of 1830—"It is the thirteenth"—may serve as epitaph to the earlier generation of

[1] J. S. Mill, *Essay on Bentham.*

constitution builders. In their place came leaders of a more practical turn of mind, inspired with a distrust of constitutions based on abstract reasoning, and with a deepening desire to seek some foundation in fact, some compromise with the actual.

The failure of the philosophic constitution builders on the Continent of Europe, and the success attending the development of British methods of government, are the dominant facts in the history of modern politics. Their results on political thought have been considerable. Thenceforth nearly all inquirers into political science have been content to abandon all efforts to deduce results from first principles. They have generally satisfied themselves with a humbler but assuredly safer method, namely, the collection of facts relating to man's life and conduct as an individual and in a community, and have striven by a comparison of these data to arrive at conclusions which may be regarded provisionally as working hypotheses. The reason for this change of attitude is obvious. The schools of Rousseau and Bentham had not understood the full complexity of the problem which they attempted to solve. They understood neither man as an individual nor human society. Their data being imperfect, their conclusions were bound to be faulty and one-sided. The work of their successors has therefore been to make good the gaps, to study man and society in the light of the investigations of natural science, and to endeavour to correlate the immense mass of facts brought to light by the biologist, the economist, and the scientific school of historians. We are still in the midst of this phase; and it therefore behoves students of political science still to adhere to the comparative and inductive methods of de Tocqueville.

Space will not permit of any notice of de Tocqueville's work. Its chief importance for us here is that it

exercised a great influence on one of the keenest of English political thinkers, John Stuart Mill. Reared by his father, James Mill, in an atmosphere saturated with exact knowledge, he learnt from de Tocqueville the limits to the operation of logic on man's social and political relations. He ceased to be a mere Benthamite, a "mere reasoning machine".[1] He no longer regarded happiness as the sole aim of human society, utility as the only test of legislation, or the rule of the majority as the *sine qua non* of civic life. De Tocqueville's book proved to his keen and receptive mind the superiority of the historical and comparative method in politics over that of argument from first principles. It taught him how to trace back both the excellences and defects of American life to democratic institutions. Democracy thenceforth ceased to be to him the absolute and unquestionable truth of man's public life. He now regarded it as a method of government, desirable on the whole, liable to grave abuse in some respects, and clearly open to many improvements.

Perhaps the contrast between the earlier and later phases of democratic thought will be best realized if we place side by side some characteristic utterances of the earlier and middle phases of John Stuart Mill's career. The first passage represents the rigid methods of his father James Mill, a firm Benthamite, who regarded politics as a purely deductive science analogous to geometry. Its postulates and axioms being granted, the science of politics could be constructed as symmetrically as that of geometry, and could be proved to lead to the adoption of the will of the majority. The most perfect political system, accordingly, was that which would infallibly ensure this result. A convinced Benthamite like James Mill entertained as little doubt about the practical side of government as he did concerning

[1] J. S. Mill's *Autobiography*, ch. 4 [p. 109, 1st edit.]

its principles. John Stuart Mill in his *Autobiography* states that his father had "an almost unbounded confidence in the efficacy of two things: representative government, and complete freedom of discussion. . . He felt as if all would be gained if the whole population were taught to read, if all sorts of opinions were allowed to be addressed to them in word and in writing, and if by means of the suffrage they could nominate a legislature to give effect to the opinions they adopted. He thought that when the legislature no longer represented a class interest it would aim at the general interest, honestly and with adequate wisdom; since the people would be sufficiently under the guidance of educated intelligence to make in general a good choice of persons to represent them; and having done so, to leave to those whom they chose a liberal discretion."

Various circumstances concurred to shake the son's faith in his father's creed. Macaulay's keen criticism of James Mill's *Essay on Government* convinced John Stuart Mill that his father's system was founded on too narrow a basis, since it ignored several essential factors. With his usual openness of mind, he revised his views on politics, no longer looking on representative democracy as an "essential principle", but "as a question of time, place, and circumstance"; and though he still cherished his former political belief, he thenceforth regarded "the choice of political institutions as a moral and educational question", &c. The very moderate success which the Reform Bill of 1832 attained was another disappointment; but more important was the impression produced on the young thinker by de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which led to a shifting of his political ideal from pure democracy to that modified form of it set forth in his later works.[1]

The reasons for this toning down of his democratic

[1] *Autobiography*, p. 191, 1st edit.

ardour are set forth in many of his writings after 1835; but perhaps in none so clearly and emphatically as in his *Essay on Bentham* (1838). After awarding due praise to his early master, he points out the chief practical defect in his political science. Bentham neglected to assign proper importance to differences of national character as determined by past history and habits of thought. But, besides this very obvious criticism, Mill urges one which is fundamental. He boldly challenges Bentham's assertion that the will of the majority must under all conditions be paramount:—"Is it, at all times and places, good for mankind to be under the absolute authority of the majority of themselves? . . . Is it the proper condition of man in all ages and nations, to be under the despotism of Public Opinion?" Here we notice a mental attitude totally distinct from the unswerving faith of Mill's early years. The principle of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" is also attacked, partly because, as Mill elsewhere says, happiness is too complex a state of mind and body to serve as a satisfactory goal of human strivings; but chiefly because the rule of the majority alone will not *necessarily* lead to the best obtainable results. He frankly admits that an absolute democracy might tend not to level up mankind, but to level it down. He points out that the majority of mankind must always be unskilled manual labourers, and that the rule of such a majority might tend "to make one narrow mean type of human nature universal and perpetual, and to crush every influence which tends to the further improvement of man's intellectual and moral nature. There must, we know, be some paramount power in society; and that the majority should be that power, is on the whole right, not as being just in itself, but as being less unjust than any other footing on which the matter can be placed. But it is necessary that the institutions of society should

make provision for keeping up, in some form or other, as a corrective to partial views, and a shelter for freedom of thought and individuality of character, a perpetual and standing Opposition to the will of the majority. . . A centre of resistance round which all the moral and social elements which the ruling power views with disfavour may cluster, and behind whose bulwarks they may find shelter from the attempts of that power to hunt them out of existence, is as necessary where the opinion of the majority is sovereign, as where the ruling power is a hierarchy or an aristocracy. Where no such *point d'appui* exists, there the human race will inevitably degenerate; and the question whether the United States, for instance, will in time sink into another China (also a most commercial and industrious nation) resolves itself, to us, into the question whether such a centre of resistance will gradually evolve itself, or not."

In this remarkable pronouncement the reaction from Bentham to de Tocqueville is everywhere conspicuous. The age of faith has vanished: that of criticism has dawned. If such was the case with so utilitarian a Radical as John Stuart Mill, it is not surprising that after the almost ludicrous collapse of democratic efforts in 1848, unbelievers like Thomas Carlyle should proclaim that democracy was a self-cancelling process, leading to anarchy—"happy if it be anarchy *plus* a street constable".[1] As the later political utterances of Carlyle were destined to have little more than rhapsodic interest, we may be pardoned for omitting any reference to them here, especially as their contradiction by the complete-suffrage party has been noticed in chapter VIII. It will be of more practical importance to trace the further development of Mill's views on the subject of safeguarding the rights of the minority under a democratic government.

[1] Carlyle, *Latter Day Pamphlets*, No. 1 (1850).

These views took definite shape in his work, *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), wherein his objections to the absolute rule of a majority lead to some practical suggestions. After asserting that representation in proportion to numbers is the first principle of democracy, he devotes nearly a whole chapter to a review of various contrivances for safeguarding the rights of the minority, without which, he asserts, there can be no true democracy. Despite his admiration for the political spirit animating the people of the United States, Mill condemns their constitution as "a false democracy, which instead of giving representation to all, gives it only to the local majorities".

Mill here cites what is perhaps the extreme case of government by local majorities; for in the election of the Senate the majorities gained in States, which differ vastly in population and importance, determine the composition of the august body which guards the federal compact. Over against this striking instance of what we may term federalized democracy the great philosopher places a system of proportional representation which, he claims, would not only save the minority from temporary political extinction, but would ensure the election of the wisest and best. He accords the highest praise to a work of Mr. Hare on *The Election of Representatives* (1859) as being "almost a specific" against the evils incidental to local representation. He welcomed Mr. Hare's plan of proportional representation for two reasons: first, as providing a far more accurate gauge of public opinion; and secondly, as being likely to result in the election of more intelligent members of Parliament. Before noticing the general details of Mr. Hare's plan, a word or two may not be out of place respecting the evils which it was devised to cure. The chief defect of the existing system was the predominance at election times of local over national interests. Wire-

pullers sought, not for the ablest candidate, but for one who would do well for the town or district. Petty interests therefore usurped the place which ought to be occupied by national concerns; so that members were too often chosen, not for their ability on questions of national and imperial import, but because of their successful catering for the interests of gas and water companies, or their liberal donations to the local infirmary.

It must be confessed that there is great force in this objection. The result is seen in the strength of what may be called the parochial spirit in a Parliament which controls the destinies of a world-wide empire. Even so complacent a Whig as Mr. Bagehot admitted the "opulent profusion of dulness" in the Parliament of Lord Palmerston's day; and it may not unfairly be attributed to the bewilderment of the parochial intellect when suddenly confronted with complex international questions. With a characteristic blending of acuteness and irony, of large-hearted hope and almost cynical scepticism, Mill noted that "the tendency of representative government, as of modern civilization, is towards collective mediocrity, and this tendency is increased by all reductions and extensions of the franchise". How much more necessary, then, that this defect of a democratic age should not be exaggerated by a faulty system of parliamentary election, but should to some extent be cured by the legislation of the wisest and best.[1] Such a result would be secured, so Hare and Mill contended, by substituting national for local election. According to this plan, the whole body of electors would be divided by the number of members to be returned—at that time 658; and the resulting quotient would determine the number of votes needed for actual election of any one member to Parliament, though the

[1]It should be noted that when in 1865 Mill entered Parliament, he ceased to advocate some of these opinions and fell into line with the advanced Radicals. But this does not detract from the value of those opinions of his middle life.

votes so given would be wholly irrespective of locality. A voter would, on this plan, be able to record his vote for any candidate in any part of the kingdom. His vote would only be counted for one candidate; but he could add other names, in order of preference, and if the object of his first choice was not successful through not obtaining the requisite number of votes, still his vote would not be thrown away, but would probably aid the return of some member. To prevent very popular candidates from engrossing nearly all the votes, any one of them was to be credited only with so many as were requisite to secure his return; the remainder of those who voted for him would have their votes counted for the next candidates on their respective lists.

Without entering into further details of this interesting proposal, it is evidently open to very grave objections on the score of its complexity, at least for an unintelligent electorate; besides which the great clerical labour involved would expose it to risks of inaccuracy where so vast a number of votes had to be assessed. It is true, as is claimed by Mr. Hare in the Appendices to his third edition, that the elections to the Danish Rigsrad, or Supreme Legislative Council, had been since 1855 conducted on a somewhat similar system, and apparently with success. But it is hazardous to argue from the case of a small kingdom with an homogeneous population to a society so varied in race, interests, and intelligence as that of the United Kingdom. It may be granted, however, that proportionate representation is the ideal towards which democracy should strive. The method is logically perfect, it imposes on voters the need of an intelligent survey of national questions and of the record of other than local politicians, and above all it frees the election of the nation's representatives from those petty parochial concerns which at present warp and complicate the main issues.

I propose to notice only a few other of the suggestions contained in Mill's *Representative Government*, namely those which have an intimate relation with practical politics, and which serve to connect the thought of his day with the Reform Bills of 1860–1867. In his chapter on the extension of the suffrage he again expresses his distrust of a form of democracy determined solely by local elections—a "false democracy" he calls it, in which the minority would have no appropriate influence. He cherished a deep-rooted apprehension that the rule of the many would be a vulgar and sordid tyranny fatal to intelligence and all forms of individual excellence, and the utmost he would concede was that he would "not despair of the operation even of equal and universal suffrage, if made real by the proportional representation of all minorities, on Mr. Hare's principle". But even when this ideal plan of voting is postulated, Mill also claims that there shall be some other safeguards to intelligence and wealth against the levelling-down tendencies which he associates with the rule of a mere majority. These safeguards are to consist in the exclusion from the electorate of all who do not pay taxes to the state, of all paupers, bankrupts, and illiterate persons. He justifies the exclusion of the first two classes on the ground that only those who have some pecuniary interest in the state can curb the lavish expenditure prevalent, for example, in American municipal affairs, and resulting from manhood suffrage. The exclusion of illiterate persons he also claims as necessary to the intelligent conduct of public affairs and a tribute to the superiority of knowledge over ignorance. With this plea, again, it is impossible to avoid sympathy; and it yet remains to be seen whether the enfranchisement of a large number of illiterates is not a danger not only to the stability but even to the liberties of the community; for it is just these who are most open, not

only to the arts of the demagogue, but to the bribes of the wealthy and of their parasites. Yet, while granting Mill's main contention, it is difficult to take quite seriously his suggestion that qualification for a vote should be withheld unless the claimant "should, in the presence of the registrar, copy a sentence from an English book, and perform a sum in the rule of three".

Those who echo John Bright's off-hand criticism of Disraeli's Reform Bill and its "fancy franchises", may be asked to remember that some of these very franchises were proposed by John Stuart Mill himself. In the chapter from which I have quoted, the philosopher claimed the right of plurality of votes, not on the ground of wealth, which he rightly held to be a most undesirable test of personal capacity, but by virtue of the discharge of difficult and responsible duties which demand skill, foresight, and intelligence. Two or three votes apiece should accordingly, he claims, be awarded to every master manufacturer, merchant, banker, or graduate of a university, in fact to everyone who might be expected to be by calling or by education more intelligent than the average man. Wisely refraining from descending to details on these topics, Mill contented himself with enunciating the principle that competence in business or high mental endowments should find adequate recognition in the most important of all civic functions, the discharge of electoral duty. To those who gibe at the proposal as academic, it may suffice to reply that the sneer will be justified when democracy of the present type has justified its existence for more than a generation. At present its trial has scarcely commenced. In the history of peoples and institutions, even a century would be scarcely a sufficient space to justify the boast of latter-day prophets, that democracy of the "one man one vote" type is the final stage of human development.

Quitting the unpractical sphere of prophecy, it will be

more fitting to notice another important development in the scientific, and ultimately in the political thought of our age. The most fertile idea of the century assumed definite form when Darwin in 1859 published his famous work, *The Origin of Species*. It is true that the doctrine of evolution had been foreshadowed by previous writers both in the domains of natural and of social science; but Darwin's statement in successive works ensured for it an immense vogue and a triumphant justification.

Into the political questions raised by Darwin's theories it is neither possible nor desirable to enter at any length. Their influence has been both to extend and complicate the issues which were prominent in the previous generation. Then controversy raged mostly on the question of natural rights, especially those of the individual to a share in the government. Now the contest is between those who would strengthen and those who would minimize the authority of the state in its dealings with the individual, especially in regard to private ownership, the claims of companies, and economic or social questions arising therefrom. Indeed, owing to the growth of industrialism, and the extended survey over human relations which has resulted from the researches of Darwin and Herbert Spencer, political discussions are no longer limited to the narrow channel of "natural right", but tend to merge themselves in an illimitable sea of social and economic inquiry.

One practical result of the theory of evolution may, however, be noted here. On all thinking men, and indirectly through them on the unthinking, it has exercised a most important influence in exposing the folly both of immobility and of sudden and reckless change in the political world. It depicts human life and society as an orderly development, proceeding not by leaps and bounds, still less with long spells of absolute torpor, but on principles of growth determined by the nature of

human society and of its environment. The study of man, of his past efforts, even of his failures in politics and social life, is therefore one essential to any intelligent forecast of his future; for the institutions and laws which embody the wisdom of his forefathers are, so to speak, the political environment which moulds his action, arouses his antipathies, or wings his aspirations. A close and reverent study of the past has therefore become more than ever necessary to the politician who would rise above the level of Little Peddlington. Such a study reveals at once the need of adapting old institutions to new needs, and the folly of heedlessly stripping off from the body politic customs which have shaped its growth. In brief, Darwinism has extinguished the Toryism of pre-reform days, and has all but banished from our political life the abolitionist mania of the succeeding generation.

Chapter XI.

The Reform Bills of 1866–1867.

We have now considered the causes, both in the world of fact and in the sphere of thought, which led to a sifting of the earlier democratic creed, the rejection of its more sweeping demands, and the postponement of any effective agitation on the whole question. The epoch 1850–1866 may perhaps best be described by a reference to the terms used by the followers of the French thinker St. Simon. They called certain eras in history *organic* when a people or a creed expanded by its sheer vitality and force; but when the time of unconscious or inevitable expansion was succeeded by one of discussion and unrest, they applied to this new age the term *critical*. Now, this latter epithet may be applied to the years

1850–1866, in regard to constitutional reform; while, on the whole, the epoch which succeeded, especially the years 1867–1873 and 1880–1885, may be described as organic in relation to democracy. Not that these epithets sum up all the characteristics of the periods to which we apply them; but they may serve as convenient mental labels, summing up our general impressions as to the flux and reflux of the Euripus of our modern political life, in which the eddies and swirls become ever more perplexing. The most casual glance over our party history will convince the observer that the labels critical and organic, as applied to epochs, are not wholly accurate, still less mutually exclusive. In the period 1851–1866 many proposals for electoral reform were brought forward. But then they all failed: and the characteristic of an "organic" period is the apparently irresistible nature of its expansion. More important is it to notice that, even in this time of sifting of opinions, two noteworthy gains were effected for the proletariate. One facilitated the enlightenment of public opinion: the other opened the doors of the House of Commons to merit irrespective of property.

The former of these movements, that for the removal of the remaining "taxes on knowledge", may be considered as a natural sequel to the efforts of 1836, and attained a successful issue in 1855 and 1861.[1] The repeal of the paper duty in 1861 was rendered memorable by the last serious struggle which has occurred between the Lords and Commons on a financial question. The government bill of 1860, which proposed the abolition of the paper duty, had passed its third reading in the Commons by the narrow majority of 219 to 210. This apparently emboldened the Lords to reject the measure,

[1] For further details on this subject see *The Life of John Bright*, by C. A. Vince, M.A., in this series. It shows the great influence of John Bright on the political developments of his time.

which was in effect, though not in form, a money bill. Technically, no doubt, this vote of the Lords was not a contravention of the constitution; but, as was privately pointed out by Lord John Russell to his phlegmatic chief, Palmerston, "the exercise of a right which has lain dormant since the Revolution (of 1688) must give a great shock to the constitution". However much the premier desired to hush up the imminent dispute between the two Houses, he was pushed on, not only by Lord John Russell, but by a far more vehement personality. Mr. Gladstone was the most famous of the group of "Peelites" who had recently rallied to the Liberal cause. Devotion to Free-trade principles and to the Italian cause, which the Palmerston cabinet championed, had at last led the former "hope of the Conservative party" into the Whig camp; and he was now chancellor of the exchequer. The vote of the Lords on a financial question touched Mr. Gladstone in one of his tenderest points; and he fired off a "magnificently mad speech on the privilege question".[1] For a time it seemed doubtful whether Palmerston would throw down the gauntlet to the Lords or accept Mr. Gladstone's resignation. As Mr. Gladstone was a necessity, the gauntlet was thrown down. Under the plea of maintaining their privileges on money questions, the government passed resolutions safeguarding similar proposals for the future; and by including their financial scheme in one very comprehensive bill, carried their resolutions as regards the paper duty (1861). This solution of the question is interesting, not only as marking the legal ratification of what had been only a prescriptive right of the Lower House, but also as illustrating the speedy development of democratic principles in Mr. Gladstone's nature.

The other question which calls for brief notice is the

[1] The expression was Earl Russell's. *Life of Lord John Russell*, by S. Walpole, vol. ii. p. 344.

abolition of the property qualification for members of Parliament. The exclusion of poor men from the House of Commons had been one of the grievances against which the Chartists had unanimously protested; and, possibly for that reason, it had been upheld by the friends of order. By a strange irony of fate, which has often dogged their steps, the champions of the constitution revised their opinion, and in 1858 ceased to oppose a motion which ten years previously they had declared to be pernicious and subversive. Mr. Locke King's proposal to abolish the property qualification required of English, Irish, and Welsh members was accordingly carried by a large majority, with no opposition from the Conservative government. The insecure tenure of power by the Derby ministry doubtless kept many Conservative members from opposing Mr. King's motion; besides which, it was evidently anomalous to require a financial guarantee from which Scottish members were by old custom exempt.

Of less practical importance, though they fill a larger space in English Histories, are the various abortive proposals of electoral reform of the years 1851–1865. It would be tedious to recount them in detail,[1] especially as the action both of individuals and of parties bore the stamp of unreality. With his usual acumen, Mill summed up the position in 1861 with the statement that both the political parties had lost faith in their creeds, while neither had made any progress in providing itself with a better. As a natural consequence, the people, always alive to such unreality, were completely apathetic on the subject of reform. Lord John Russell, who had long

[1] The most significant were those for the assimilation of the borough and county franchise by Mr. Locke King in and after 1851; Mr. Hume's bill of 1852; Lord J. Russell's bills of 1852, 1854, and 1866; Mr. Disraeli's bill of 1859, with its "fancy franchises"; Lord Palmerston's bill of 1860; Mr. Edward Baines' proposals of 1861 and 1865; and Mr. Gladstone's bill of 1866. See Murdoch's *History of Constitutional Reform* (1885).

ago disavowed the "finality" speech of 1837, was the first to admit that his electoral proposals of 1860 were doomed not so much by the hostility of foes as by the indifference of friends; and he advised the postponement of the whole question until the country was more awake to the need of reform. That, he urged, would be better than "dragging an imperfect measure through a reluctant Parliament and enforcing it on an unwilling country".[1] The advice was only too welcome to a premier who spoke of any reduction of the £50 county franchise as "a leap in the dark".

The question became vital only when it was pressed home with the power of genius, at a time when various causes were producing unrest in the body politic. The death of Lord Palmerston in October, 1865, removed the chief obstacle of a personal nature to a forward movement. In place of the jocular, bantering habits of the veteran, the House of Commons was now to feel in its new leader, Mr. Gladstone, an intensity of moral earnestness the aggressiveness of which was to increase with increasing years:

> "A stature undepressed in size,
> Unbent, which rather seemed to rise
> In open victory o'er the weight
> Of seventy years, to loftier height".

His tendencies towards democracy, after gaining in strength by the events of 1860–1861, had received new vigour owing to his rejection by the University of Oxford and his return by South Lancashire (July, 1865). He had hitherto endeavoured to unite the spirit of the past, represented by Oxford, with the eager industrialism of which Lancashire was the representative; but there can be no doubt that, in his politics, the influences of his native county now became predominant over those long exerted by his *alma mater*. With Mr. Gladstone as the

[1] Letter to Lord Palmerston, Nov. 16, 1860.

champion of reform, the question now lost its academic character, and began to arouse eager sympathy or furious hostility; for it has been alike his misfortune and his glory ever to move amidst storm-clouds of controversy and mantled with the dust of conflict. The conversion of Mr. Gladstone to democratic principles has therefore been an event of the highest importance. His eager spirit has unconsciously but inevitably drawn him far beyond his cautious declaration of May, 1864, that parliamentary reform ought not to be left until agitation arises, but that agitation should be forestalled by wise and provident measures. Much as he has doubtless desired to act as Neptune, calming the storms of Parliament, energy and enthusiasm have often made him the Æolus not only of Westminster, but of the country at large.

The magnitude of his influence in 1866–1885 will be obvious if we briefly estimate the aims of reformers in 1850–1865. Their chief efforts had been by various devices to select for admission to the franchise only the best of the unrepresented classes. For instance, the bills of Lord John Russell of 1854 and of Mr. Disraeli of 1859, though differing in details,[1] proposed to enfranchise only those who by their amount of income, their rental, or their deposits in savings-banks, might be fairly considered as possessed of energy, intelligence, or prudence; and due weight was attached to education by the admission to the franchise of all graduates of universities. In fact, as Disraeli said, the extension of the franchise was to be not *radical* but *lateral*, importance being also assigned to the *variety* of the classes and interests to be enfranchised.[2] The measures of 1850–1865

[1] That of 1854 proposed a £6 rental as admitting to the borough franchise, and £10 to the county franchise.

[2] In Mr. Dickinson's *Development of Parliament* (1895), chapter ii., this thought is illustrated with scholarly thoroughness and insight. It seems to me, however, that the party tactics of 1866–67 are responsible for the change, which the able author ascribes as ultimately due to the act of 1832.

aimed, in fact, at securing a due balance of interests; so that the old electorate, while being enlarged on all sides, should not be swamped by a wholesale irruption of illiterates. The difficulty of securing this due balance amidst the tug of party warfare and the vehement attacks of Radicals, led by John Bright, were the chief causes of the failure of the Reform Bills before 1865.

But party strife, and, still more, party expediency, were soon to sweep away all the safeguards which even a Radical like John Stuart Mill then recognized as desirable, if not essential, to well-ordered progress; and by two successive plunges England entered upon a form of advanced democracy such as before 1867 no responsible statesman and few thinkers would have deemed either possible or desirable.

The history of the events of 1866–1867 cannot be fully written until the correspondence of some of the chief actors is entirely revealed to the world. At present, it can only be regarded as one of the strangest and most unaccountable exploits of political legerdemain. Mr. Gladstone's Reform Bill of 1866 was, on the whole, one of the old type, resembling its unfortunate predecessors of the period 1851–1865. Postponing for the present the question of redistribution of seats, he dealt only with the electoral franchise, a course of action which, as in 1884, exposed him to sharp and ultimately successful criticism.[1] He now proposed to extend the right of voting to tenants paying a rental of £7 a year in boroughs, and £14 in counties; while lodgers paying £10 a year and depositors having £50 in savings-banks were likewise to have votes. These and a few other changes

[1] In view of the constitutional conflict which in 1884 was to rage around the question of separating the Franchise and Redistribution Bills, it may be well to note Mr. Gladstone's procedure in 1866. At first he proposed to keep them entirely distinct—a course ably defended by Mr. Bright; but ultimately, after much discussion, he communicated the details of the Redistribution Bill to the House, before the Franchise Bill went into committee.

would enlarge the electorate by about 400,000, that is, by double the numbers affected by Mr. Disraeli's proposals of 1859 and Lord Palmerston's of 1860. It is difficult, therefore, to account for the animus at once aroused by these moderate proposals, except on the score of party jealousy or personal dislike of Mr. Gladstone.

The measure was attacked for what it was and for what it was not. Mr. Laing complained that it left Honiton with as much political power as Liverpool or Manchester; while Mr. Lowe, developing sarcastic powers which surprised the House and exasperated working-men, declared that it would put power completely into the hands of the working-classes, who were quite unqualified for this responsibility. He claimed that the rise of wages and general prosperity of the country placed the £10 rental well within reach of thrifty and intelligent workmen, who, according to Mr. Gladstone's own admission, already formed at least 21 per cent of the borough electorate. A reduction of the limit to £7 would, he maintained, tend to degrade the tone of elections and of parliamentary life. In his reply Mr. Bright twitted Mr. Lowe with desertion from the Liberal ranks, using the famous "cave of Adullam" metaphor to designate the group of malcontents. But ridicule and arguments were of no avail. It was in vain that Mr. John Stuart Mill, now member for Westminster, in a speech unsurpassed for wealth of thought, disclaimed any fears concerning the enfranchisement of the seven-pounders. It was in vain that Mr. Gladstone, in a passage of thrilling eloquence, appealed to wider influences than those of party and of Parliament—"The great social forces which move onward in their might and majesty, and which the tumult of our debates does not for a moment impede or disturb—those great social forces are against you: they are marshalled on our side;

and the banner which we carry in this fight, though perhaps at some moment it may droop over our sinking heads, yet soon again will float in the eye of heaven; and it will be borne by the firm hands of the united people of the three kingdoms, perhaps not to an easy, but to a certain and to a not far distant victory". In spite of this prophetic appeal, the second reading of the bill was carried by the ominously small majority of five! "Thereupon", says an eye-witness, "there arose a wild, raging, mad-brained shout. Dozens of half-frantic Tories stood up in their seats and madly waved their hats. The Adullamites waved their hats in sympathy; and he, Lucifer,[1] the prince of the revolt, stood up flushed, triumphant, and avenged, his complexion deepened into something like bishop's purple."

Although the government now appended a very moderate Redistribution Bill, their whole measure was wrecked by an amendment in committee. Thereupon the Russell ministry resigned, and for the third time Lord Derby took office in the teeth of a hostile majority. Never was victory more disastrous to the victors. If Gladstone threatened the Tories and Adullamites with whips, Disraeli was soon to chastise them with scorpions. Other causes, besides the inspiring appeals of Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Bright, tended to reanimate the social forces of the age. A sudden commercial panic, culminating in "Black Friday" (May 11, 1866), roughly awakened the average Briton from his years of podgy contentment to a feeling that all was not well. Moreover, the exciting scenes at Westminster had much impressed the people; and large meetings, almost on the scale of the Chartist gatherings, were planned to agitate for reform. Scarcely had the Derby ministry taken the reins of office when the home secretary forbade a reform demonstration in Hyde Park. It was an unwise decision. The average

[1] *i.e.* Lowe; see Irving's *Annals of Our Time*, April 27, 1867.

Londoner hardly answers to Aristotle's definition: he is not a political creature; at least, he is so only when his real or fancied rights seem threatened. Then he is up in arms. That is a question which he can understand; and he then makes and unmakes ministries as readily as his forefathers unseated kings who tampered with civic privileges. The right of meeting in Hyde Park about any and every subject was more to him than any electoral reform. To Hyde Park accordingly Londoners thronged on July 23, broke down the railings, and stoned the policemen who endeavoured to eject them.

In ordinary circumstances the riot would have been forgotten in a fortnight; but amidst the excitement caused by the commercial panic, by Fenian plots, and by a sharp attack of cholera, Lord Derby's weak government became nervous, and wavered under the strenuous attacks of John Bright and other stalwarts of reform.[1] The Conservative ministry was indeed in so false a position that it must often have sympathized with the reformers, who blamed Earl Russell for not forcing on a dissolution of Parliament. We can now see that such a course would have been the best, not only for the reform cause, but for the honour of our political life. But amidst the distractions caused by approaching war, commercial panic, Fenianism, and cholera, a general election in the summer of 1866 might well seem an evil to be averted at all costs.[2] It may also be conceded that neither Lord Derby nor Mr. Disraeli had ever opposed an extension of the suffrage. Both concurred in the desire of passing a "safe and moderate measure".

Nevertheless, the oddity of the situation and the whimsicalities of their leader aroused many apprehensions amongst the government minority in the Lower House,

[1] For Bright's influence at this time, and the indignation aroused by Lowe's supposed gibes at artisans, see Mr. Vince's *Life of Bright*, chapter v.

[2] See S. Walpole's *Life of Lord John Russell*, ii. p. 430, for the queen's letters reproaching her ministers for resigning "on a matter of detail".

at the opening of the session, which were not allayed by Disraeli's declaration that reform ought no longer to be a question determining the fate of cabinets. This, at any rate, portended finality after the various abortive efforts of 1852–66, and a secure tenure of power to those who were about to cut the Gordian knot! Neither were Tory fears quelled by the dexterous appeal to all members of the House to divest themselves of party feeling in considering the resolutions now forthcoming. It soon transpired that under the guise of enunciating abstract truths, the ministerial resolutions were "squeezable" to almost any extent; and it was with mixed indignation and alarm that Lowe deprecated their discussion, "while the press is hounding all on so as to bring the institutions of the country down to the level of democracy". He further upbraided the government for their almost open invitation to members, "Say what you like to us, only for God's sake leave us our places". By a curious irony of fate, these gibes of the Adullamite chief unsteadied the wavering governmental lines, and induced a strategic move to the rear. Disraeli consented to focus his resolutions in a "real and satisfactory" reform bill,—a concession which led to the resignation of Lords Carnarvon and Cranborne, and General Peel. The outlook seemed threatening. It was evident that one more ministry was in jeopardy between Scylla and Charybdis. Two courses were open: to jettison reform, which would have lightened the craft, but enraged the owners and the crew, besides wrecking the pilot's reputation; or to allow their reform cargo to be so trimmed and readjusted as to remedy the "list" and satisfy the malcontent majority. The latter course was adopted, the officers forthwith carrying out the orders which came from the forecastle. Thus was it that the modern Ulysses saved his ship.[1]

[1] See Malmesbury's *Memoirs of an ex-Minister*. "Cabinets all May on

It remains to consider the changes thus brought about. Out of 61 sections of the Reform Bill of 1867 only four were the work of the ministry, the rest were so profoundly modified in committee, with the consent of ministers, as to elicit from General Peel the caustic remark that nothing had so little vitality as a "vital point", nothing was so insecure as a "security", and nothing was so elastic as the conscience of a cabinet minister.[1] The sting of the satire lay in its accuracy. After asserting that the government would "never introduce household suffrage pure and simple", Lord Derby and Mr. Disraeli acquiesced in its insertion, thus giving effect to one of the chief claims of the old Birmingham Political Union. Besides giving up the £6 rating limit in boroughs, the ministry reduced the £20 limit, as originally proposed for the county franchise, to £12. At the dictation of the opposition, a lodger franchise of £10 was accepted, and the distinctions between various classes of rate-payers were abolished: the provisions assigning special votes to persons having £50 in the funds, £30 in a savings-bank, or paying £20 a year in direct taxation, were likewise withdrawn. "Lateral" extensions of the franchise, which proposed to assign votes to graduates of universities, ministers of religion, and members of any learned profession, were lopped off by John Bright's renewed denunciation of "fancy franchises", though philosophical Radicals had claimed such franchises as a desirable set-off to the mere counting of heads. Lastly, the redistribution of seats, as Lord

Reform Bill. The *laissez-aller* system followed by the government, trying to make the best they could of it, but constantly yielding something. The Conservative members seem disposed to adopt everything, and to think that it is 'in for a penny, in for a pound'." It should be remembered in Disraeli's favour that when urged in 1873 to take office, though with a minority behind him, he refused, owing to the ignominy which so false a situation entailed. On the other hand, he must have foreseen in 1867 whither events were certain to lead him.

[1] Buxton, *Finance and Politics*, vol. ii. p. 12, note.

Cranborne complained, effected changes fifty per cent greater than had been originally contemplated, thereby yielding to John Bright the victory all along the line.

As for the various "checks" which had been prominent in every bill since 1852, they too had gone by the board. Their only relic was a device, apparently first suggested by Earl Russell, of forming "three-cornered constituencies". On a motion, at first rejected but finally accepted by ministers, three members were allotted to each of the following towns—Birmingham, Leeds, Liverpool, Manchester, and, in the act for Scotland, to Glasgow. This proposal was made by Mr. Laing, seconded by Mr. Baines, and had the support of Mr. Gladstone, but failed in the Lower House. It was reaffirmed by the House of Lords, with a proviso that each elector in those towns should have only two votes, so that the minority would naturally return one of the three members. With this clumsy and irritating expedient (doomed to disappear in 1885) the friends of minority representation were ill content. Mill had failed to secure any approval for Mr. Hare's plan of proportionate representation; and his motion in favour of according the suffrage to women was rejected by 196 to 73. The differences between the two Houses having been arranged, the bill received the royal assent on Aug. 15, 1867.

Such was the change which enlarged the electorate from 1,352,970 in 1867 to 2,243,259 in 1870, a change neither loudly called for by the great masses of the people nor desired by the very men who passed it. As to the immorality of the tactics which led to the "leap in the dark", few will harbour any doubts. Prepared in a hurry, modified beyond recognition, shuffled through helter-skelter in order to "dish the Whigs", it will stand to all time as a masterpiece of political trimming; and, on the score of political morality, few will deny some sympathy with the feelings of the Adullamite

chief, who, looking at the measure precipitated by his own headlong opposition to Mr. Gladstone's sober Act of 1866, now expressed "the shame, the rage, the scorn, the indignation, and the despair with which this measure is viewed by every Englishman who is not a slave to the trammels of party or who is not dazzled by the glare of a temporary and ignoble success". To which there came a characteristic personal retort from the opportunist statesman, who had dragged the Tory squires over the very brink of democratic suffrage, and a declaration that he had confidence in the national character of England, in her fame, in the tradition of a thousand years, and in that glorious future which awaited her.

Opportunism, in fact, was now to be the dominant note of political life not only in Great Britain but on the Continent. The years 1866–67 are the most critical in the recent developments of democracy. Flouted and despised ever since the mad rushes of mobs in 1848, a democratic suffrage was now suddenly adopted or accepted by responsible statesmen of the three great Teutonic states. Hostility to bureaucratic Austria moved Prussia to champion the principle of universal suffrage in German affairs. The victory of the northern power not only ensured the acceptance of a democratic suffrage in the North German Confederation, but compelled Austria to come to terms with her long restive Hungarians and other subjects. The end of the year 1867 accordingly witnessed the adoption, more or less reluctant, of parliamentary representation in all the lands between the Baltic and the Adriatic.[1]

The resemblance between British and continental developments was of course only superficial, though it

[1] Cf. Bismarck's admission—"I accepted universal suffrage, but with repugnance, as a Frankfurt tradition" (*i.e.* of 1848). Busch, *Our Chancellor*, Eng. Ed. vol. ii. p. 196.

may be questioned whether the imminence of the Austro-Prussian war at midsummer, 1866, by rendering a dissolution of our Parliament hazardous or impossible, did not contribute to the strange events leading up to the Conservative Reform Bill. In any case, the world now saw with cynical surprise the adoption of democratic franchises at Berlin, Westminster, and Vienna by the very statesmen who previously had offered the most strenuous opposition. In reviewing these events one cannot but feel the truth of Canning's adage—"Those who oppose improvement because it is innovation, may one day have to submit to innovation which is not improvement". For whatever views may be entertained as to the merits of the franchises granted in these years, they were undoubtedly conceded from sheer expediency, and, what is more important, without any of that preparation in the lives of the respective nations which is the very life-blood of worthy citizenship. Changes, which might have wrought nothing but good if they had come as the natural result of civic training, were hastily flung to astonished peoples as the result of partisan or diplomatic manœuvrings for place and power. In this fact we may discern one cause of the comparative failure of democracy to attain that higher moral development, which has ever been the goal of its worthiest champions; and possibly the want of any vital relation between civic duty and the new political privileges may account for the swift relapses into indifference which have so often recurred when the material interests of the newly-enfranchised classes have received temporary satisfaction.

It will be alike impossible and undesirable to do more than notice the salient features of the memorable measures which ensued after the downfall of Mr. Disraeli's ministry in 1868. Coming into power with a majority of 128, Mr. Gladstone held a more commanding position than had been enjoyed by any premier since

1832, and he now proceeded to give effect to many demands which had been postponed during the supremacy of Lords Palmerston and Derby. The two first great measures were prompted by a desire to remedy the chief grievances still felt by the majority of the Irish people, namely the supremacy of an alien church and the pressure of an unjust land tenure. The disestablishment of the Church of Ireland removed the last relic of that Protestant ascendency, which had been the central principle of British policy towards the sister island from the time of William III.'s conquest down to the concession of civic rights to Roman Catholics in 1829. Mr. Gladstone's act of 1869 completed the edifice of religious and civic equality, of which the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel had rather reluctantly reared the framework.

Equally important was the endeavour of the new ministry to heal the agrarian troubles of Ireland by extending to all parts the plan of compensation for improvements which was enjoyed by tenants in Ulster. The Irish Land Act of 1870, which passed both Houses of Parliament by large majorities—in the Commons by 442 to 11—is the first important effort at remedying immemorial grievances in land tenure so as to ensure something like a partnership between landlord and tenant. The act may be considered as a concession to that spirit of equality which has been increasingly applied to agrarian affairs ever since the first French Revolution. But it was also a necessity to establish a *modus vivendi* between an unpopular and largely non-resident landlord class, and a prolific population which clung to a soil that never could adequately support them. The process has been pushed on by imperious economic forces. Every railway driven into the virgin prairies of the Missouri, Saskatchewan, and La Plata has sharpened competition for the corn-growers and

graziers of the Old World; and had not Parliament striven to readjust the relations between landlord and tenant, not only in Ireland but in Great Britain, our agriculture might have fallen into the state of that of ancient Italy.

Of the other great measures of the Gladstone ministry, two only need be noticed here. The Ballot Act, passed in spite of strong opposition by the Upper House, gave effect to secrecy of voting, for which Mr. Grote, and after him the Chartists, had agitated in vain. The opposition was ostensibly based either on sentimental objections to secrecy, in which some Liberals, among them John Stuart Mill, concurred; or on the more serious contention that personation at elections would be easier than heretofore. The new system has, however, on the whole proved to work remarkably well, and has justified the persistence of its early champions. Another of the "points" of the People's Charter was hereby gained.

In its far-reaching social results, the Act for providing Elementary Education may be pronounced to be the most important act of the whole period. Other measures altered the balance of political power; but none has entered so intimately into the life of the people, or borne results so fruitful and beneficial, as the act passed by Mr. Forster in 1870. Imperfect in some details though it was, this great measure for the first time put education within the reach of every cottager, supplementing, without destroying, the work which the National and British schools had nobly endeavoured to carry on. The question of religious instruction, which had been the *crux* in and after 1843, was now solved by the Cowper-Temple clauses in a compromise which has successfully resisted the immediate onslaughts of Mr. Miall and the Nonconformists, as well as clerical attacks in recent years. Now, at last, the people of the United Kingdom gained

that modicum of "schoolmasters' education" for which Carlyle had passionately pleaded in *Past and Present.*

It must be confessed that Mr. Forster's measure was to some extent the result of middle-class apprehensions. In the midst of his invective against the Reform Act of 1867, Lowe had exclaimed that it was thenceforth absolutely necessary to compel our future masters to learn their letters, and that education must be pressed on without delay for the peace of the country. In an exaggerated form he expressed the fears of many thinking men of an earlier day, when the teachings of Owen and Hodgkin were agitating the working-classes. Those apprehensions were curiously expressed by John Stuart Mill. In his zeal for education, the philosopher declared that he rejoiced at the power which those levelling notions about property still had over artisans, because fear and fear alone would compel the middle classes seriously to take up the education question in order to dispel such fallacious notions. These fears were doubtless a trifle antiquated in 1867; but the notorious trade-union outrages at Sheffield showed that there was still grave danger in allowing our labouring population to grow up in brutalizing ignorance.

The impressionable character of an untrained populace was rarely more manifested than in the speedy decline in popularity of the Gladstone cabinet in 1871–1873. Various external causes have of course been plausibly assigned for this swing of the pendulum. The distractions caused by the Franco-German War, the commencement of those senseless menaces from Berlin which have sown discord between us and our Teutonic cousins, the rather tame surrender by the Gladstone ministry of the Black Sea clauses of the Treaty of Paris in deference to Russian demands, its complaisance to the United States over the exorbitant awards in the Alabama arbitration,—all these naturally reawakened our national spirit, which

had lain dormant under the cyclonic activity of domestic legislation. Indeed, the phenomenal reforming zeal of the years 1868–1872 tended to weld various vested interests on to the shattered Conservative party. Patriots enraged at the degradation of Britain to the rank of a second-rate power, employers of labour who feared the rising demands of their "hands", military officers fuming at the abolition of the time-honoured "purchase system", naval critics of Admiralty maladministration, tax-payers incensed at the increase of charges imposed by army and educational reforms, Nonconformist ultras alienated by the Education Act, clerics irritated by the abolition of religious tests at our universities, Irish Nationalists stung to the quick by the Peace Preservation Act,—all were swept into the opposition drag-net. It was in vain for Mr. Gladstone to declare, shortly before the dissolution of Parliament, that if he were returned to power, he would abolish the income-tax. Mr. Disraeli made exactly the same bid for power, and skilfully flattered the *amour propre* of the nation which Gladstone's pacific policy had ruffled. Such were the chief causes undermining the popularity of the powerful Liberal administration. Their result was seen in the general election of 1874, which sent up to Westminster 350 Conservatives, as against 244 Liberals and 58 Home Rulers.

Looking back calmly on the five years of the Gladstone administration, it must be considered as falsifying the worst fears of its opponents no less than disappointing the enthusiastic hopes of its supporters. On the one hand, the fears of the old Whigs, who regarded Demos as an insatiable Caliban, that must be taught to read and write lest perchance he might rend Prospero and engulf at once his learning and his goods, were soon seen to be the result of nightmare. Prospero and Miranda remained unharmed. Taxation was reduced, and wealth advanced with giant strides. The policy of

systematic bleeding of the wealthy had not yet found favour with any but the smallest section of the Radicals; and these were utterly outnumbered by the men of property, who still retained their old predominance in the Commons. Just as the results of the Reform Act of 1832 were toned down by the personal ascendency of Earl Grey, Lord Melbourne, and Lord Palmerston, so the results of the transition to democracy, accomplished in 1867, were mitigated by the ascendency of Mr. Gladstone and of colleagues who represented still more fully the old Liberalism. Owing to this fact, to the distractions caused by Irish and continental troubles, and to the general prosperity of the country, the enthusiasm for political change speedily cooled. And yet, with the exception of the disestablishment of the Irish Church, no one of Mr. Gladstone's Acts can be called destructive. Neither were the rights of property trenched upon except in some provisions of the Irish Land Act, which did little more than apply to other parts of Ireland the tenant right of Ulster. The legislation of 1868–1873 was sober, constructive, and on a level with the highest traditions of the past.

Chapter XII.

The Ebb and Flow of Public Opinion.

It must be confessed by all unprejudiced observers that the Reform Act of 1867 inaugurated a period of unrest and political instability. As the competition between parties for the enjoyment of popular favours has become keener, every general election has aroused boundless hopes of the felicity to be bestowed on the nation by the new administration.

"Man never is, but always to be, blest."

If Pope's verse is true of his complacent age, how much more is it correct of our own, distracted by alluring ideals and warring programmes! This is at once its glory and its danger. Hope has energized masses of the people that previously were sunk in torpor; but it has also swayed them heedlessly from side to side in search of the enchanted fruit of happiness temptingly dangled before their eyes. This is a natural, perhaps inevitable, result of recent reform acts. The admission to the electorate of classes that necessarily know little about the limitations which beset the action of the most benevolent law-makers, and still less about the complexity of our national interests, has tended to magnify the hopes of the nation, and also to deepen the disappointment which almost inevitably follows. Competition for the votes of the newly enfranchised leads to the cultivation of the art of programme making, and the successful claimants for power come into office weighted with an impossible programme and a discordant majority.

After five years of legislative activity, the benefits of which few will now contest, Mr. Gladstone saw the majority of 128, which supported him in 1869, transformed by the general election of 1874 into a minority of 106.[1] His successor, Mr. Disraeli, was to experience the same fate, the general election of 1880 changing the majority of 106 into a minority of 106, if the Home Rule vote be omitted from the comparison. As I shall show in the next chapter, the agrarian measures promised by Mr. Gladstone in 1885, and the extension of household suffrage to the rural districts, portended a continuance of Liberal predominance, until the Home Rule Bill cut athwart the plane of political life. It can hardly be said to have restored the balance of political power, for it

[1] Reckoned as between Liberals and Conservatives only. The appearance of 58 Home Rulers, definitely organized as a party, confuses the statistics when compared with those of 1868.

would be absurd to use a metaphor which implies stability to denote a series of oscillations. The only regularity in our modern political life is the almost monotonous periodicity of its changes. The appended foot-note will illustrate more clearly than any description the instability of our modern political system, which may be realized by placing in contrast the conditions which obtained before the Reform Acts of 1867 and 1832.[1] Roughly speaking, the period 1714–1793 may be described as one of unbroken predominance for the Whig governing families, disturbed by factious feuds, but not marked by any changes based on principle. The advent of militant democracy in France dissolved for ever the hitherto triumphant Whig oligarchy; and the Tories, rallied by the younger Pitt to the support of the throne, enjoyed a tenure of power, which was broken only by the reform movement of 1831–32. The great electoral change of 1832 closed the era of almost Chinese immobility, and ministerial changes followed with perplexing rapidity; but these changes, when not merely of a

[1] The following are the results of the general elections of 1833–1895:—

	Liberals, &c.	Conservatives.	Home Rulers.
1832, ...	486	176	—
1835, ...	380	273	—
1837, ...	348	310	—
1841, ...	286	367	—
1847, ...	325	331 (of whom 105 were Peelites)	—
1852, ...	315	339 (of whom 40 were Peelites)	—
1857, ...	366	287	—
1859, ...	348	305	—
1865, ...	361	294	—
1868, ...	393	265	—
1874, ...	244	350	58
1880, ...	349	243	60
1885, ...	335	249	86
1886, (Liberal / Home Rulers)	191	394 (including 78 Lib. Unionists)	85
1892, (Liberal / Home Rulers)	274	315 (including 46 Lib. Unionists)	81
1895, (Liberal / Home Rulers)	177	411 (including 71 Lib. Unionists)	82

personal nature, were often due to the evenness of the parliamentary struggle, especially in the years 1847 to 1866, when the electors enfranchised by the measure of 1832 had settled down into the parties to which they had most affinity. On comparing the strength of parties in the years 1847–1866 with the figures of the next twenty years, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that each extension of the suffrage has increased the uncertainties of political life. Whether these changes will ultimately tend to the re-establishment of a new equilibrium, as happened after the electors enfranchised in 1832 had become inured to the responsibilities and disappointments of the political game, time alone can show.[1]

I have already suggested some causes, both internal and external, for the instability which marks the years since Mr. Disraeli's Reform Act. On the whole, I am inclined to assign less importance than is usually done to the external causes, that is, to the opposition of "vested interests" to which a defeated party is ever wont complacently to ascribe its disaster. It seems impossible that so great a change could have been brought about merely by a combination of vested interests, especially as these had always been more or less hostile to Mr. Gladstone's programme. It was perfectly well known what the Liberal ministry would attempt; and only in foreign and Irish affairs were any surprises in store for the electorate. It is true that the *personnel* of the Gladstone ministry was not perfect. Mr. Ayrton's lofty pretensions, Robert Lowe's stinging tongue (not to speak of his match tax), even the somewhat Aristides-like

[1] The instability of opinion will be more strikingly obvious when it is remembered that the increase in the size of the average constituency has been enormous. This ought to have contributed to stability, and doubtless it will do so when political opinion has solidified. In the old rotten boroughs the transference of a score of votes frequently turned the scale. Now it generally needs five hundred or so; but the transfer of the five hundred is apparently quite as easy as that of the score used to be.

quality of Mr. Gladstone's character, all contributed to worry and weary the public mind. But then the people must have been singularly impressionable, not to say fickle, to have allowed such trifles to weigh in the balance with the undeniable benefits received from the ministry. Nor were these boons only prospective. Taxation had been lightened to the extent of £12,000,000, and the national debt had been reduced by £26,000,000. Trade had improved. Coming to power shortly after a commercial crisis, the administration left the country in a blaze of prosperity, which ought to have counterbalanced Disraeli's gibe that ministers lived in a blaze of apology. But the country forgot the boons and remembered only the jests. Several ministries have fallen victims to bad harvests or commercial crises. It was reserved for the year 1874 to witness the growth of the nation's wealth by leaps and bounds, and the increasing unpopularity of an administration which had largely contributed to that prosperity.

The fundamental cause of the revulsion in popular feeling seems to me to reside in the unpreparedness of the new electorate for its duties. It was certainly not educated up to the level of Mr. Gladstone's reforming zeal. Indeed, an examination of the legislation of 1869–1873 proves its motive power to have resided, not so much in the people's will as in the convictions of the premier and a few of his colleagues. The British people can stand "heroic legislation" only in small doses. John Bright expressed the feelings of the average man when, surprised at Gladstone's decision to bring in the great Education Bill only two days after the introduction of the complex Irish Land Bill, he exclaimed that it was like attempting to drive six omnibuses at once through Temple Bar. Yet the feat was accomplished; and what is far more, the ministry carried through Parliament every important item in its programme except the ill-starred

Dublin University Bill. The pace was certainly trying to John Bull. But he had been warned of it before he paid his fare. The journey ended safely, prosperously, even happily, as it seemed; and yet he at once transferred his custom to the opposition coach. It is difficult to believe that he was the same personage as before the change of 1867; and indeed a comparison of the election results before and after 1867 shows how important was the change then effected. The constancy to party ties, which had marked the previous generation, was replaced by a habit of "voting agin' the government", whether it does or does not carry out its programme. In 1869–1874 the ministry apparently did too much. The country was so surfeited with reforms that the legislation of those years, which was expected to win the eternal gratitude of the newly enfranchised, aroused only a passing sentiment. The people most benefited by the reforms were as yet too complacent or callous to appreciate them at their true value; and the very Ballot Act, which, it was supposed, would add to the political power of the proletariate and attach it to the Liberal party, served as a screen for its ingratitude in the election of 1874. It is not surprising that Mr. Gladstone soon decided to resign the thankless position of a political leader for the less transient charms of literary life, until the forlorn cries of a distressed Eastern people again appealed to his humanity, and called him once again into the arena of party strife.

Mr. Gladstone was not richly dowered by nature with that social tact or worldly wisdom which comprehends not only the greatness but the littleness of mankind. He could not see that the country wanted rest and comfort, pleasure and prestige, rather than epoch-marking reforms. Mr. Disraeli understood the needs of the time. The artisan class wanted a few practical measures such as would add to the comforts of life.

These the new premier granted by his factory legislation, by Mr. Cross's Artisans' Dwellings Act (1875), and by the act for the proper supervision of Friendly Societies. He thus strove to emulate the enlightened example of Henri IV. of France, who boasted that in his time every peasant could have a fowl in his pot.

But side by side with this *pot au feu* policy, Disraeli cherished vaster designs. He saw that wealthy England was weary of the narrowness of the Manchester school and of the humiliations entailed by its "peace at any price" policy. His judgment was correct. The middle classes were slowly but surely outgrowing the "little England" ideas of the days of Cobden. A pacific foreign policy and devotion to domestic legislation were doubtless desirable when England was in the throes of her industrial revolution, and was distracted by desperate strikes or Chartist demonstrations. But those days were past. The worst grievances had been healed. Free-trade had brought cheap bread to the artisan and abundant orders to the manufacturer and merchant. The very success of the Manchester school in expanding our commerce passed the death sentence on the "little England" policy which was needful in the "forties". The splendid growth of Greater Britain reawakened in the race those larger aspirations towards a world-wide Commonwealth which had lain dormant since Waterloo; and now, when the German Empire sprang full-armed into life, and blatant militarism became the dominant note of European politics, there was imperious need that the mother land should turn her gaze seawards, and should protect her defenceless colonies and merchantmen against the jealousies, rivalries, and possible assaults of mail-clad continental powers. This phase in our national development was natural and inevitable. Our wealth had provoked envy which was far from being appeased by Mr. Gladstone's pacific concessions. The

nation therefore demanded precautionary measures and a stiffer tone in our foreign policy. Surely, though unconsciously, the nation was swinging back from what I have ventured to call the introspective or domestic phase of life to the expansive phase which must now and again mark the growth of any vigorous insular race. However guilty of ingratitude towards individuals, the nation must satisfy the needs of its existence. Those needs were for the time imperialist; and Disraeli seemed about to satisfy them by his "spirited foreign policy".

The two chief aims, then, of the new premier were to promote comfort at home by soothing little instalments of social legislation and to enhance the nation's prestige abroad. For a time this deft admixture of the prosaic and the sublime seemed to give general satisfaction. The Artisans' Dwellings Act facilitated the destruction of fever-breeding dens and the erection of healthier dwellings.[1] The Friendly Societies Act, while not interfering unduly with the working of provident societies, provided some safeguards against the frauds and follies which had wrecked so many of these valuable institutions. The Factory Acts of 1875 and 1878, and other measures regulating the status of workers, bore witness to the honest intentions of the ministry, and of the premier, who in his novel *Sybil* had expressed his desire to rally the artisans under the banner of some modern Simon de Montfort. While these measures appealed to Saxon domesticity, the premier's foreign policy had that touch of romance which might have been expected from the author of *Tancred*. Disraeli knew that under John Bull's prosaic exterior there lurk ideas, if only they can

[1] A practical result is Corporation Street, Birmingham, which, by the energy and foresight of the town-council (especially of Mr. Chamberlain), was driven through a wretched slum, and provided not only a fine thoroughfare, but ample accommodation for the hitherto badly-housed artisans. See Dolman's *Municipalities at Work*, p. 12. For some objections to the act of 1875 see Dr. Cunningham's *Politics and Economics*, p. 171.

be made vocal by some skilful interpreter. The race which had produced Sidney, Spenser, Drake, Essex, Raleigh, Marlborough, Clive, Wolfe, and Chinese Gordon, could not be lacking in world-subduing qualities. These qualities must now be reawakened to consolidate the dominions which Britons had won. That pride in the empire which moved even the gloomy poet of Olney to impassioned verse must again play its part in the history of the race. Its imperial instincts must assert their supremacy over the huckstering side of the Saxon nature.

It seemed that the United Kingdom had secured the ideal policy which satisfied its duality of interests, reconciling the desire of comfort in the cottage with the passion for world-wide renown, combining the prose of domestic interests with the glamour of eastern romance, the *libertas* of the Saxon with the *imperium* of the Roman. How came it that even the political art and rhetorical felicity of a Disraeli failed to wed these ideals in a lasting union?

In brief, the prose of the western hemisphere and the passions of the eastern world conspired to destroy the new policy, by pitting against each other our industrial and imperial interests. The United Kingdom is the Janus of the modern world: it is the meeting-place of the east and the west. Politically it must perforce turn eastwards to safeguard its Australasian and Indian possessions. Industrially its gaze is turned westwards by the gigantic industrial and agricultural developments of the New World. There is the eternal conflict of interests which must ever tax the powers of British statesmanship. They have never been so tested as in the years 1874–1880, which were rendered memorable by unequalled activity in the peaceful development of the North American continent, and by popular commotions in the usually immobile east. Let us briefly examine

the concurrent effects of these events in English political life.

Every reduction in the cost of iron and steel, every triumph of the engineer, whether in the construction of railroads or of steamships, has tended to annihilate distance, to place the settler of Nebraska on almost even terms with the farmer of Norfolk in competing for the London market, and thereby to reduce old English estates to something like the value of prairie land. For political and economic reasons which need not here be detailed, the results of our free-trade policy were only fully felt after 1870. Their pressure was most severe during Disraeli's tenure of power, when successive bad harvests at home threatened to involve landlord, farmer, and labourer in one common ruin. The agrarian crisis, which had long been foreseen by Free-traders, was thus swiftly and acutely developed. It seemed to portend the same results for the United Kingdom as those which were fatal to the agriculture of ancient Italy, converting its fertile plains into a wilderness of great estates, a purgatory to the cultivators and a paradise for the wealthy. Under the selfish Roman oligarchy free-trade desolated the country districts, driving the peasants into overcrowded cities, where they subsisted on government doles of Libyan corn. Was it to have an analogous result on the life of England and Ireland? Considered merely on economic grounds, our agricultural position was almost as serious as that of Rome in the days of the Gracchi. Our land system was as little suited to withstand the strain of American competition as was that of ancient Rome when the cheap corn of Sicily, Libya, and Egypt began to flood her markets. But the moral and political conditions were altogether different. The House of Lords had by a considerable majority ratified the abolition of the Corn-laws, an act which has received all too scanty a recognition from partisan historians.

Not only had the peers of the United Kingdom by that concession exposed their rent-rolls to the full force of foreign competition, they had also assented to Mr. Gladstone's Irish Land Act of 1870; and now, when its provisions were rendered obsolete by the onward rush of American competition, many of the Irish landlords accorded substantial reductions of rent. The same action was still more generally followed by landlords in Great Britain to necessitous tenants—behaviour which stands in noble contrast to that of the senators of ancient Rome, who clung to every shred of legal right and hounded agrarian reformers to death.

Yet, in spite of the generally enlightened and open-handed conduct of British landlords, an agricultural crisis so acute as that which began after 1875 inevitably embittered class relations, and fostered a democratic spirit such as never before had invaded the rural districts. It was in vain that Parliament passed the Agricultural Holdings Act (1875), granting compensation to tenants for unexhausted improvements. The measure was permissive, rendering such payment compulsory only where both landlord and tenant had agreed to abide by its provisions; and many landlords, scared by the prospect of increasing demands on a diminishing rent-roll, contracted themselves out of its operation. It was in vain that the premier used all the resources of his facile logic to prove that the land might and must support landlord, tenant, and labourer, not to speak of tithe-receiver. For once he spoke to deaf ears, even in his own Buckinghamshire. As distress deepened and taxation increased, class hostility developed in intensity. Farmers demanded a revision of land-laws in the interests of tenants, remembering full well that Cobden and Bright had demanded such a revision as necessitated by the increased area of foreign competition. Above all, they pressed for relief from the game-laws,

under which the landlords' sport seemed to be regarded as prior to the tenants' interests. Now, on these topics Cobdenites had long been insisting in vain. At last, under the pressure of distress, the bucolic mind gave heed; and farmers began to look to the Liberal party for agrarian reforms more drastic than any which could be expected from the holders of power.

But farmers were not the only class that was induced by the pressure of American competition to coquet with democratic ideas. The movement began to agitate even the stolid agricultural labourers, who looked with envy on the position gained by trade-unions for town artisans. For the first time since the collapse of the Agricultural Labourers' Unions in 1834–1835, Hodge began to become a political creature and talk about his rights—an important development, which, as will shortly appear, prepared the way for the agrarian policy of the Liberal party in 1884.[1]

Even more serious were the results of foreign competition in the economic and social life of Ireland. Despite the well-meant efforts of Mr. Gladstone to readjust the relations of landlord and tenant, those relations became ever more strained. Differences of creed and of race often separated landlord and tenant in that unhappy island, where there were few industries except agriculture for a population whose birth-rate was the highest in Europe. Every force which could make for social unrest was therefore at work in Ireland, when a prominent member of the Home Rule party saw in the agrarian question a means not only of shattering landlordism, but of dissolving the union between Great

[1] The increased importance attached to the extension of household suffrage to the rural districts may be measured by the votes of the House of Commons on the subject. In 1872 it was rejected by 148 to 70; in 1873 it was talked out; in 1874 it was rejected by 287 to 173; in 1875 by 268 to 166; in 1876 by 264 to 165; in 1877 by 274 to 218; in 1878 by 271 to 219; in 1879 by 291 to 226.

Britain and Ireland. In October, 1879, Mr. Davitt formed the Land League, which forthwith commenced a systematic campaign against the payment of rent, and before long enabled the Home Rule party almost to snatch a victory.

Such were the chief influences of American competition on the agriculture and society of the United Kingdom, tending inevitably to the modification, if not the Americanizing of our laws and institutions. But while our patriarchal customs were exposed to an economic strain unparalleled in the history of the modern world, the storm-cloud of war began to appear in the East, small at first, but speedily spreading over the whole sky. A famine of unsurpassed severity in India in 1876–1878 taxed alike the powers of the Indian government and the generosity of the British public. By an unfortunate coincidence the new title of Empress of India, recently accorded by Parliament to Her Majesty, was officially proclaimed at Delhi on New Year's Day, 1877, when large tracts of India were already devastated by the famine; and a title which was meant as a spirited retort to the advances of Russia in Turkestan, was at that time deemed by many to be the cynical avowal of an ambitious and heartless imperialism. This impression was deepened by the Afghan policy of the Indian government, which embroiled us in a serious war, and hopelessly deranged the finances of our great eastern dependency. People began to ask whether an almost bankrupt possession, which embroiled us in constant wars, gave any adequate return for the efforts of the "weary Titan".

These searchings of heart were rendered more acute by the Earl of Beaconsfield's[1] policy in the Eastern Question. Into the merits of that policy it is impossible here to enter; but now that the Bulgarian atrocities have

[1] Mr. Disraeli received this title in August, 1876.

paled before infinitely greater horrors, it may be safely admitted as a non-partisan statement, that the conscience of the British people was deeply shocked at the determination of the ministry to uphold the integrity of the Turkish Empire on the score of British interests. There was a general feeling of repugnance, not only at the Turcophil policy of the government, but at the imperial interests which seemed to call for that policy. The feeling was honourable to the conscience of our people, even if it was expressed by Mr. Gladstone in his Midlothian campaign with the zeal of a prophet rather than the foresight of a statesman. However much the imperialism of Lord Beaconsfield may be criticised in regard to details, there can be little doubt now that he laid down the general lines of policy which must be followed by the British race if it is to hold a foremost place in the world.

But even those who admit his prescience as to the broader issues of imperialism may still criticise his Indian or his Turcophil policy, either on the score of morality or of its inexpedience under existing circumstances. There can be little doubt, indeed, that his action on these questions contributed largely to the revival of the Liberal party in 1878–1880; but it may be doubted whether the dreary succession of wars and rumours of wars would alone have hurled the Conservatives from power, had not our resources been grievously depleted by the agrarian troubles previously described. The depression in trade and agriculture, and the war expenditure for the East and in Zululand, were conjointly responsible for a series of deficits which in 1880 amounted in all to £10,000,000,[1] and that too in spite of considerable additions to taxation. The people, who had previously grown accustomed to magnificent surpluses, visited their resentment on the government, which, after

[1] Buxton, *Finance and Politics*, ii. p. 256.

proclaiming its championship of social legislation, left the classes mutually suspicious, trade and agriculture in the depths of stagnation, and our resources crippled by a heavy expenditure. It is said that the general election of 1880 was decided by the unpopular foreign policy of the government and the glowing oratory of Mr. Gladstone. To the present writer these causes seem inadequate to account for the swift change in public opinion. Probably the agrarian difficulties, and the depression of trade which they entailed, were of far greater potency. The *pot au feu* policy of the government had been a failure owing to the causes previously described; and farmers now for once joined hands with the town artisans in helping to power the party which promised peace abroad and drastic agrarian legislation at home. This combination of various classes of malcontents possessed few elements of stability; but it sufficed (as was the case in 1874) to overturn a government and to inaugurate a new period of legislative activity and social unrest, the chief features of which will be noticed in the next chapter.

Chapter XIII.

The Third Reform Act.

In a speech delivered at Brighton amidst the turmoil aroused by the third Reform Act, Sir George (then Mr.) Trevelyan revealed the origin of the demand for the assimilation of the borough and county franchise, of which he had been the most persistent parliamentary champion. He said that his attention had been riveted on this question in 1868 by the earnest appeals of his artisan constituents in the Border burghs. They had recently been admitted to the suffrage by the second

Reform Act, which, though according votes to every householder in a parliamentary borough, still kept the limit of the county "occupation" franchise as high as a £12 rental. They strongly urged their member to turn his attention to the work of removing this inequality, by which nearly all members of their class were excluded from the county franchise. He was led to devote his special energies to this task by his admiration of the motives which inspired the request—"This proposal began in unselfishness, and it has been unselfish and disinterested to the very end". The incident proves that the third movement for reform, which led up to the Acts of 1884–1885, owed its origin to the feelings of the working-classes as largely as that of 1830–1832.

The second Reform Act had no distinctively democratic origin; but the party manœuvres which carried it led up to a compromise that no one pretended to regard as final. The resulting anomalies were scarcely less irritating than those which it removed or mitigated. The electoral device which, while according to five large towns three members apiece, really reduced their parliamentary voting power to one, was denounced in scathing terms by the veteran member for Birmingham; and while the "three-cornered" trick irritated the Radicals of the great towns, the inequalities between the urban and rural franchise served to awaken the artisans of suburbs and farm labourers to the fact that they too had a real grievance. Why should every holder of a rickety tenement in a parliamentary borough have a vote, while the artisans renting £11 cottages in Peckham or Ancoats, and the small tenant-holders of Kent and Midlothian, were still excluded from the suffrage? The inequality was exasperating, even to a people which was not imbued with the continental mania for political symmetry. Reformers, moreover, could cite the arguments of Mr. Disraeli in 1859 as being fatal to the

anomalies of borough and county franchise created by the Act of 1867. In introducing to the House of Commons Lord Derby's Reform Bill of 1859, the young Conservative leader defended the principle of a general £10 limit to the suffrage in these words—"In order to bring about a general content and sympathy between the different parts of the constituent body, the government proposes to recognize the principle of identity of suffrage between counties and towns". These words now supplied reformers with an excellent text in their new efforts for electoral reform. The claims of logic, the sympathy of town artisans for their suburban or rural brethren, the grievances which these suffered at the hands of stupid vestries or harsh landlords, the need of a completer representation of our ever-increasing manufacturing districts, all these topics furnished inexhaustible materials for the champions of reform. The shortcomings of the Redistribution Bill of 1867 were mercilessly exposed.[1] It left one member apiece to 42 boroughs, all of which had fewer than 7000 inhabitants; 142 boroughs, having a total population of 1,751,000, sent, in all, 172 members to Westminster; while Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Glasgow, containing 1,832,000 inhabitants, practically counted only 4 votes in a parliamentary division.

But this was not, in the main, a question for the great towns so much as for the rural districts. The climax of the industrial revolution had been reached in the years 1837–1848. The brunt of the agrarian crisis, resulting from American competition and from other causes which were explained in the last chapter, was felt most keenly in and after the year 1876. Just as the grinding pressure of want had at the earlier date enrolled hundreds of thousands of operatives in the Chartist ranks, so now agricultural distress permeated farm

[1] *e.g.* in Mr. John Noble's pamphlet on the Reform of Parliament.

labourers, and for a time even farmers themselves, with Radical notions. As has previously been shown, the general election of 1880 was decided very largely by agrarian questions. And when the severity of the agricultural crisis was not appreciably mitigated by the Ground Game Act, the abolition of the malt tax, and other remedial measures, the plan of creating peasant holdings gained general favour as affording a means of solving the agricultural problem. If peasant proprietors could not successfully meet American competition in corn, yet in dairy and market-garden produce they would surely be able to hold their own against the peasants of France, Holland, and Denmark. At any rate, the formation of peasant holdings would tend to root the people in the soil, and stop the drift to the towns which was depleting the country and crowding the rookeries of London. Such were the ideas which were soon to find definite expression in the idyllic programme "three acres and a cow". Rural labourers themselves were aroused from their usual lethargy, and looked on the franchise as a means of attaining the felicity with which Feargus O'Connor had enchanted the minds of their fathers in the forties. It was evident that only the Liberals or Radicals could now effect the transformation of rural Britain into the Arcadia of the poets; for only this party could or would arm Hodge with the modern diviner's wand, the franchise.

Such appear to have been the chief motives which propelled onwards the democratic movement in and after 1880. Some there were who advocated household suffrage on the same lofty motives as those which animated Joseph Sturge and the Complete-Suffrage party forty years previously. Others again saw in a drastic electoral change a means of ensuring the predominance of domestic reforms over foreign affairs, and of recalling the Liberal government from its Egyptian adventures.

Springing from whatever motives, the demand of household suffrage for the counties gathered force and volume through the years 1880–83, and it was skilfully enforced by Liberal clubs. But the desire for electoral reform was not by any means one-sided. The Conservative party was no more opposed to a well-considered extension of the suffrage than it had been in the years 1859–1867. Conservative legislation had strengthened the bonds connecting the party with town artisans; and their party managers knew perfectly well that the greater predominance which must be given to London, to suburban districts, and to counties, would ultimately, if not immediately, tell in their favour. Events have fully justified their prescience. On the platform and in the press there was some approach to unanimity as to the need of a change.[1] The chief questions raised were those relating to the method of procedure, though some public men loudly questioned the desirability of effecting an important transfer of political power in the midst of the excitement aroused by Irish troubles and Egyptian complications.

The last-named questions, however, furnished to the rank and file of the Liberal party a reason for pushing on electoral reform. The propelling power was certainly exerted by Liberal clubs; and the whole movement therefore presents a complete contrast to the course of affairs in 1867, when the debates in the House first aroused any general interest. Now the reverse was signally the case. In pursuance of resolutions passed

[1] "That there must be sooner or later a change in the electoral system is admitted by all Liberals and almost all Conservatives; and it is hardly possible for men of sense to avoid the conclusion that an early and final settlement is from every point of view to be desired. If it be acknowledged that the situation created by the Act of 1867 cannot be permanently maintained, it is clearly wise to remove at once an excuse for perpetual legislative tinkering and to establish the relations of parties on a permanent basis. The Conservative elements in English society will not be extinguished by electoral changes" (*Times*, Oct. 16, 1883).

by the National Liberal Federation in May, 1883, a great meeting of delegates of clubs was held at Leeds in October to confer on the whole question. The first resolution, urging the government to bring in a Reform Bill in the next session, was passed with enthusiasm, an amendment moved by Mr. Firth in favour of giving priority to London municipal reform being negatived. Speeches by Mr. Morley, Dr. Dale, and by that sturdy veteran in the cause of reform, John Bright, made a great impression. Those of Mr. Morley and Mr. Bright are noteworthy as advising the separation of the questions of franchise and redistribution. The latter closed with a threatening reference to the Lords in case they resisted the change, or presumed to require the production of the scheme of redistribution before the fate of the Franchise Bill were decided. Mr. Morley, however, admitted that the Upper House had a "legitimate right", if they chose to use it, of having the question of redistribution submitted to the constituencies before accepting the government plan. The precedent of 1866 could certainly be urged in favour of the claim, which was soon to be urged by the Lords, that the whole scheme must be made known before any decisive votes should have been taken on the Franchise Bill.

We now proceed to notice the details of the Franchise Bill, which Mr. Gladstone introduced into the House of Commons on Feb. 5, 1884. He justified the action of the government on grounds of justice and patriotism. The strength of a modern state lay in its representative institutions; and he claimed that the present proposals would lay the foundations of government broad and deep in the people's will, and would "array the people in one solid compacted mass around the ancient throne which it has loved so well, and round a constitution now to be more than ever powerful and more than ever free". The Act of 1832 had added considerably less than half

a million of voters to the electorate; the ultimate results of the second Reform Act had been to extend the suffrage by about 1,000,000; while the present bill would enfranchise no fewer than 2,000,000. This would be effected mainly by the extension of household suffrage, and the lodger franchise of 1867, to counties and to suburban districts previously merged in counties. But in addition to the lodger vote of 1867 Mr. Gladstone proposed to create a "service" franchise; that is, he proposed to accord votes to officials, servants, grooms, and the like, who occupied rooms or cottages, though they paid no rent whatever. Turning to the question of redistribution of seats, he justified its separation from that of the franchise on the ground that it was infinitely complex, sectional, and local, while the right of voting should be determined on broadly national issues; but he expressed the "hope" that the more difficult question might be settled in the following year.

In the debates which followed, Lord Randolph Churchill objected to the bill as inopportune in a time of foreign complications, and also on the more general ground that agricultural labourers were, as a rule, quite unfitted for the discharge of the same political rights and duties as the far more intelligent manufacturing and mining population. Mr. W. H. Smith opposed its extension to Ireland, where it would lead to a policy of confiscation of property. On the whole, however, the opposition fastened on the separation of franchise and redistribution as the most objectionable feature of the scheme; and it would be puerile to deny that under cover of this objection many members cloaked their designs to thwart both proposals. Despite the almost open threats to the Lords if they should resist or thwart these propositions, the Upper House passed Lord Cairns' amendment, which demanded the association with the Franchise Bill of proposals for the redistribution of seats.

At once there arose a furious hubbub. Charges and countercharges hurtled through the air; and the suspicions thus aroused imported into our political life unwonted heat and violence. It was in vain that Mr. Gladstone proposed the passing of an identical resolution in each House that the Franchise Bill had been or would be passed, in reliance on a promise of the ministry to introduce a Redistribution Bill in the following session. That, exclaimed Lord Salisbury, offered no guarantee that Mr. Gladstone would not introduce a wholly objectionable scheme of redistribution, which he might force down by aid of the Franchise Bill as soon as it became law. "Show us all your plans, or we will not pass the first instalment", exclaimed the Peers and their Tory backers. "No," retorted the Liberals in effect, "you want us to link both together that you may defeat both. A two-legged race is not to our fancy." So the conflict raged. The welkin of Midlothian again re-echoed with oratory. Demonstrations, threatening the ending or mending of the House of Lords, darkened squares and market-places; pamphleteers and editors raked up the precedents of 1866 to prove anything and everything; the constitution tottered.

But amidst all the racket the small voice of common sense began to whisper of compromise. As has been already shown, the two parties were by no means irreconcilably opposed on the principle of the proposed measures. Uncompromising divergence of aims characterized only the *intransigeants* of each side, and the tacticians who saw in the conflict a means of abolishing the Upper House. But these feelings were confined to a few. The passions of the moderate men on both sides were hardly so inflamed as to defy the appeals of reason. Their resentment had been aroused by the suspicion that their opponents were working to outwit or overreach

them. The occasion evidently called for the services of two or three "honest brokers", and these now quietly arranged the conditions for a conference of the leading men on both sides.[1] When rhetoric yielded place to reason the whole thing was found to be capable of arrangement. The private conferences held between Mr. Gladstone, Lord Hartington, and Sir Charles Dilke on the one side, and Lord Salisbury and Sir Stafford Northcote as leaders of the opposition, unravelled the parliamentary tangle. The Upper House now agreed to pass the Franchise Bill on its second reading, with the understanding that the forthcoming Redistribution Bill should be made "the subject of friendly communications".[2] The committee stage of the Franchise Bill and its third reading were postponed, in the House of Lords, until the Redistribution of Seats Bill had been introduced by Mr. Gladstone into the House of Commons.

The general principles of this second very important measure were now explained by the premier. Without adopting the scheme of equal electoral districts, the Redistribution Bill aimed at bringing about approximate equality of representation; but there was to be little or no abolition of historic names, such as had moved the fears of the opposition. Towns containing fewer than 15,000 inhabitants were, for electoral purposes, to be merged in the county districts to which in most cases they demised their names. Towns where the population ranged between 15,000 and 50,000 were to return one member only. These changes liberated 160 seats, in addition to which six seats, previously declared vacant for bribery,

[1] In Mr. Andrew Lang's *Life of Lord Iddesleigh*, vol. ii. pp. 205–215, the details will be found. First the Duke of Richmond, and, later, Lord Norton, hinted at a meeting of the leaders. Lord Iddesleigh (then Sir Stafford Northcote), in a secret interview with Mr. Gladstone at St. James's Palace, helped to clear away misunderstandings. The separation of suburban and rural districts was desired by both. Other difficulties, viz. those of procedure, were also removed, and asperities were smoothed down.

[2] For details, see Hansard, Nov. 17, 18, 1884.

were to be reconstituted. These six were to go to England. Scotland received an increase of twelve members, while the number of members for Wales and Ireland remained unchanged. As a result, the membership of the House of Commons was raised from 658 to 670. Further, the principle of single-member divisions was generally adopted,[1] a decision which drew an unavailing protest from the champions of proportional representation, Mr. Courtney and Sir John Lubbock. In vain did they point out that the minute subdivisions of towns and counties would frequently distort the verdict of the town or county as a whole. The single-member plan evidently had the merit of being simpler, and therefore of being more easily worked by a half-educated electorate, and the cause to which John Stuart Mill had devoted his energies was accordingly shelved, as in 1867. The result is that the 670 members of Parliament are now mostly elected in a multitude of small areas, where local or parochial concerns frequently overshadow the larger national questions which are presumed to be solely under consideration.

Apart from this defect, which perhaps may be to some extent remedied by the spread of education and growth of intelligence, the Redistribution Bill may be regarded as effecting an important and satisfactory change. For the first time London and the new industrial centres received their due share of political power, which hitherto had been absorbed by petty townships of the south and east. In place of 22 members, London and its vast suburban districts were to return 62; and the numbers allotted to the chief towns were as follows:—Liverpool, 9; Manchester and Salford, 9; Glasgow, 7; Birmingham, 7; Leeds, 5; Sheffield, 5; Edinburgh, Dublin, Belfast, and Bristol, 4 each; and so on. Equally great were the

[1] The exceptions were the City of London, and towns of from 50,000 to 165,000 inhabitants, which were to return two members apiece.

gains to the manufacturing counties, Yorkshire returning 26 members, and Lancashire 23, apart from those sent up by their towns. Even so, the voting power of London and the great towns of England is not relatively so great as that of distant country districts, especially those of Ireland. But, as was asserted by Mr. Gladstone, the very remoteness and sparseness of population of those districts constituted a claim for departing from a strictly numerical basis. The great towns could well look after themselves, because "the actual political power in these concentrated masses is sharper, quicker, and more vehement".

In many respects the Franchise Act of 1884 and the Redistribution of Seats Act of 1885 are the most important measures of the century. Their significance can only be fully realized by the student who has traced the course of the democratic movements of the previous generations. Manhood suffrage and equal electoral districts, two of the claims of Major Cartwright and his reform committee of 1780, and, later, two of the points of the original People's Charter, were now approximately secured. The extension of prosperity to the poorer classes has brought the position of holder of a tenement, or of a lodger, within the reach of all who can by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as capable of the intelligent discharge of political duties. Indeed, the experience of recent years would seem to show that among the newly enfranchised classes the very poor give a fitful and almost unreasoning adherence to either party, and cause those swift and apparently unaccountable vacillations which are the despair of responsible politicians and the joy of "wreckers".

While the approach to manhood suffrage has been as close as any friends of political stability could wish, the approximation to equal electoral districts has been less pronounced. The desire to spare historic towns was

prompted by a no less amiable feeling than that which perpetuated old names and areas wherever possible. As a result, the new county divisions may be regarded as a far more satisfactory compromise between the old and the new, between tradition and modern needs, than the singularly uninteresting departmental divisions imposed on France by the rigorously mathematical democrats of 1789. The different methods employed are characteristic of French and English democracy. No less noteworthy is the peaceful character of the transition to a new electoral system, which forty years earlier had been declared to be subversive of the constitution and of the rights of property. This fact is another signal instance of the adaptive powers of the English parliamentary system. In 1848 it seemed as impossible that any House of Commons should ever pass the substance of the People's Charter as, in 1830, that the borough-mongers' Parliament should pronounce sentence of death on Old Sarum. Yet both agitations achieved an almost bloodless triumph through the very Parliament which was denounced as corrupt or imperfect. Never surely has the wit of man devised any scheme which, while subjecting all proposals to salutary sifting and delay, has so persistently left the door of hope ajar in view of the multitude which sought admittance. If, as the critic of democracy asserts,[1] satisfaction and impatience, "the two great sources of political conduct", were reasonably satisfied by our older electoral system, surely it may be admitted that the Acts of 1884–85 gave a reasonably tardy and cautiously incomplete gratification to the aims and desires cherished by democrats for two or three generations.

Limits of space preclude any attempt at a detailed examination of the legislation which resulted more or less directly from the Acts of 1884–85. Nor, indeed, has

[1] Sir H. Maine's *Popular Government*.

the time come when any such attempt can be essayed with satisfactory results. The general election of 1885 showed how strong were the feelings of agricultural labourers in favour of drastic agrarian reforms. While Conservative triumphs in the boroughs were surprisingly numerous, the voice of the two millions of enfranchised voters was given with no uncertain sound for the policy of small holdings. As a result, 334 Liberals, 250 Conservatives, and 86 Irish Home Rulers, came up to Westminster; and the makeshift government of Lord Salisbury was ejected by the adoption of an amendment to the address expressing regret that there was no mention of allotments for labourers (Jan. 1886). But a surprise was in store. Mr. Gladstone, instead of basing the existence of his new government on the agricultural questions which had brought it to power, suddenly executed a strategic right turn towards Mr. Parnell's following. This action speedily ruptured the Liberal party, and brought about a new grouping in the political kaleidoscope. On the defeat of the first Home Rule Bill, Mr. Gladstone appealed to the country, which retorted by electing 316 Conservatives, 191 Liberal Home Rulers, 78 Liberal Unionists, and 85 Irish Home Rulers. The alliance between Conservatives and Liberal Unionists, the latter led by Lord Hartington and Mr. Chamberlain, has had the effect of completing the political education of the Tory party, which Sir Robert Peel and Mr. Disraeli had so strenuously commenced.

Opportunism, introduced by the Act of 1867, now rushed in like a flood and began to obliterate the old party landmarks. The democratic principle was formally adopted by Lord Salisbury's government in its very important Local Government Bill of 1888, which introduced into counties and a few large boroughs (including London) an electoral system based on household suffrage. For the first time in our history since the

decay of the old folk-moots, county affairs were placed on a completely popular basis; and the government of London regained the democratic character which it had lost since the perversion of the mediæval trade gilds from their primitive uses. The Gladstone ministry in 1893 introduced a bill, which was passed in the following year, extending the elective principle to rural parishes having a population of 300 or more. All householders were to have votes in the parish meeting, which was to be summoned at least once a year. The parochial councillors, having been elected by ballot, were to discharge nearly all the functions of the old vestry meeting—a stunted survival of the old Saxon folk-moot. The new council deals with sanitary affairs, can acquire land for allotments or for recreation, and may under certain conditions found a free library. It is, in fact, an adaptation of the old democractic folk-moot to the needs of the present age.

A survey of the political history of this century seems to prove that there is an irresistible tendency in the English people to hark back to the earlier conditions of the national life. Sometimes it is the result of a conscious adoption of an earlier programme, as when the more intelligent Chartists justified their demands by reference to those of 1780; while the reformers of 1780 had also appealed to the venerable charters of English liberties. In those cases the recurrence to earlier precedents was deliberate and avowed. In other instances, similar conduct has been the outcome of the unconscious but imperious instincts of a sturdy stock, which in the long run repels all the warping influences of Feudalism, and reverts to the old Saxon ways. This is at once the paradox and the salvation of English political life, that even its innovating efforts tend to the conservation or reconstruction of the old national and local institutions.

Chapter XIV.

Democracy and Labour.

Though it is impossible to review the whole area of legislative activity since the inauguration of a new epoch by the Acts of 1884–85, yet it seems desirable to examine the bearing of the new developments on two very important spheres of our national life, labour legislation and foreign policy. On the satisfaction of the very diverse and often antagonistic demands which confront the British government in industrial life and in foreign relations, must chiefly depend the future of this people.

In attempting to review the course of recent industrial legislation it will be well at the outset to examine the question in the light of the events of 1830–1850. The persistence of national character, and even the tenacity with which working-men have clung to earlier aims and methods, will probably furnish a clue as to the meaning of present developments. What, then, were the aims which inspired artisan leaders in the period just named? Were those men communists and levellers; or did they seek practical means for the redress of definite grievances?

It may be urged that Chartism was closely connected with Robert Owen's propaganda and that of Hodgkin, the former of whom expressly claimed for his scheme a world-wide application; also that several of the Chartists retained to the end the regenerating and levelling theories which they learnt from those thinkers. That statement is only partly correct. Lovett, Hetherington, and a few other moral-force Chartists were at first disciples of Owen; and the latter strongly avowed in his *Poor Man's Guardian* that all distinctions of rank and property must be swept away. The prime impulse which drove Lovett

and Hetherington into Radicalism was undoubtedly the teaching of Owen and Hodgkin, which promised a speedy and effectual cure for the prevalent misery. But before the definite revival of the old democratic programme in the People's Charter, these two able artisan leaders had seen the error of their ways. Lovett broke away from his teacher in order to found a co-operative society on practical lines, and openly renounced the follies of Owenism;[1] while Hetherington, on the decease of his acrid print in 1835, found it desirable to commence another which contained more news and fewer diatribes against property. Many other proofs might be cited in proof of the declining popularity of Owen's and Hodgkin's ideas about that time.[2] The introduction to the People's Charter drawn up by Lovett, conveys no hint that any redistribution of property was aimed at. The first number of O'Connor's *Northern Star*, as we have seen in chapter v., dangled before working-men the prospect of equality with their richer neighbours and of a "respectable provision" for "every unwilling idler in the state". But even this vaguely alluring programme was afterwards tacitly shelved, and the only practical result was the very harmless Land Scheme, which may be regarded as the precursor of "three acres and a cow". The evidence points directly to the fact that the mass of our people, even amidst the misery of the thirties and forties, were ultimately repelled rather than attracted by

[1] In Appendix I. to his able work *The Labour Problem* (1896) Mr. G. Drage, M.P., seems to me to assign too much importance to the supposed levelling schemes of the early Chartists. In support of his views he quotes a few phrases from the address sent by the London Working-men's Association to Belgian artisans as to the producers of wealth having the first claim to its enjoyment. But, as Lovett shows in his *Autobiography*, this was in 1836, and was called forth by special circumstances; and on page 45 he states why he gave up communism, though he clung to the co-operative production of wealth.

[2] See my article on "The Unstamped Press, 1815–36", in the *English Historical Review* of October, 1897, which shows the small circulation of Owenite and other "levelling" papers.

the levelling theories advocated more or less openly by Spence, Robert Owen, and Hodgkin. Enthusiasts like Lovett, Hetherington, and Bronterre O'Brien, who at first disseminated these notions, were gradually brought, either by their own better sense or by that strange yet almost unerring instinct which guides our people on these subjects, to abandon them altogether, or to embody them in practical demands, such as that for the due taxation of wealth, which have finally been adopted by responsible statesmen.

This fact is of the utmost importance. In a time of the keenest distress, rendered additionally acute by the Corn-law and the Poor-law, English artisans turned away from the theorists who were demanding a reconstruction of society and a redistribution of property, and threw their weight almost wholly into a movement which aimed first and foremost at effecting through Parliament a remedy of their worst grievances. Well may Carlyle praise John Bull because, "after infinite tumblings and spoken platitudes innumerable from barrel-heads and parliament-benches, he does settle down somewhere about the just conclusion: you are certain that his jumblings and tumblings will end, after years or centuries, in stable equilibrium". Truly so, to an extent of which the seer of Chelsea could not have dreamed. No other people has gone through such miseries, and these too enhanced by law, and has listened to the siren voice of confiscation, without heading straight for the rocks.

The bearing of this on existing political conditions is fairly obvious. The people of the United States have been declared to be the despair of extreme socialists. Their individualism, their sense of what is due to individual enterprise and liberty, whether during life or in the right of bequest to posterity, is so keen that it throws off even the most potent arguments drawn from the armoury of Karl Marx. This is after all not surprising, consider-

ing how pleasant are the places in which their lines are cast, and how much of the total result is due to the energy and ingenuity of individuals. But the marvel is that in our old overcrowded country, where the landlords lived at ease on broad domains while the many toiled for a pittance in noisome townships and reeking factories, where the few made laws which pressed hard on the many, yet there was no war of classes, no general rush for division of land or distribution of wealth, but a steady resolve to use the law to mend the law, and to regain for the masses that grip on the People's House which had been the bulwark of the nation's liberties.

But, while discarding the viewy schemes of Owen, our artisans always regarded political rights as a means of bettering their position by practical reforms. It was natural that they should look on politics from this practical stand-point. To gain a vote meant to regain part at least of the creature comforts which had been lost amid the shifting scenes of nineteenth-century life. Time was when some of them had been well-to-do woolcombers or hand-loom weavers;[1] perchance their fathers had been freeholders in the county, and had been courted and bribed for their votes as assiduously as the stout yeoman in the village election scene depicted by Hogarth. At any rate, they had heard about the good old times before the great war, when prices were cheap, work was regular, and wages were good. Why, then, should they, the sons, sink to the position of drudges without rights and privileges, because fate had doomed them to work in a township for a master who knew them not? Such were the notions dimly hovering in the minds of the wage-earners, impelling them to demand the fran-

[1] "Lancashire was once a particularly loyal county. A call was made on their patriotism to repel the gigantic power of Bonaparte: 30,000 volunteers stepped forward, and upwards of 20,000 were hand-loom weavers. . . Dare any government now call upon the services of such a people living upon three shillings a week?" (*Parl. Report of 1834*).

chise as a means of redressing the balance which the statesman and the engineer had tilted against them.

Viewing the matter morally and historically, their action was completely justifiable. The details presented in my first chapter prove that the industrial and agricultural changes which rendered the first half of this century for ever memorable depressed the status of the poor even while they enhanced the wealth of the community. On the ground of justice and even of expediency the wage-earners might accordingly claim every consideration from the community in respect to all their worst grievances. These were an oppressive taxation, unhealthy conditions both in the cottage and the factory, inability to gain compensation for injury incurred while in the employer's service, and inadequate return for the long hours of labour. It was for the redress of these practical grievances that British artisans claimed the franchise, and not for the establishment of an ideal society or for the levelling of incomes. The close connection between industrial wrongs and the growth of Chartism is everywhere obvious. Fed on the misery of 1837–42, the movement declined after that date, except where bitter and prolonged strikes went against the men. Reviving in 1847–48 amidst the trade depression, lock-outs, and reduction of wages of those years, it was lulled to rest by the gold discoveries and commercial prosperity which marked the next decade.[1] Workmen who had gained their immediate needs, regular work and better wages, could afford to wait for the future, which indeed has brought far more than any of them ever conceived in the important changes that we will now briefly examine.

It is a curious fact, but easily capable of proof, that

[1] The evidence afforded by the Chartist Convention of 1848 on this point is conclusive. Nearly all the speakers urged that the general misery compelled a forward movement. Only the Edinburgh delegate said that his constituents were not poverty-stricken Chartists, but "Chartists from principle". See Gammage, *The Chartist Movement*, p. 303 (edit. of 1894).

the first demand for interference between the employer and employed came from philanthropists and benevolent employers, not from the workmen themselves. The earliest Factory Acts, those of 1802 and 1819, were the result of representations made by local authorities and by enlightened masters, among whom were the first Sir Robert Peel and Robert Owen, as to the miserable state of the children and young people employed in many factories. Of all Robert Owen's actions none was more beneficent than his endeavour by legislation to extend to all factories some of the benefits which he freely accorded to his work-people at New Lanark. Though meeting with only limited success, his example stimulated the action of others, even though they totally disagreed with the other features of his political and social creed. Lord Ashley (afterwards Lord Shaftesbury), and Messrs. Sadler, Oastler, and Stephens, were the next champions of the factory hands. All four were Tories of the old school, resolute opponents of Whig manufacturers and *laisser-faire* economists; and their efforts, aided by those of Mr. Fielden, a man who had raised himself from the ranks to be a wealthy manufacturer and Radical member for Oldham, were chiefly instrumental in gaining the Acts of 1833, 1844, and 1847. The last of these, limiting the work of all young persons and women to 10 hours a day and 58 a week, crowned with success the efforts of influential men who for nearly twenty years had chivalrously been pleading the cause of the weak and helpless. The arguments of Lord Ashley and his coadjutors were based mainly on moral grounds, though they were careful to show that previous reductions of the hours of labour, while raising the quality of the work, had not sensibly diminished the output.[1] The Ten Hours Act, together with the Mines Act of 1842, marks the close of

[1] See Lord Shaftesbury's speeches in House of Commons, March 15, May 10, 1844, and January 29, 1846, in his volume of *Speeches* (1868).

what may be termed patriarchal legislation on this subject. Other acts, it is true, especially those resulting from the royal commission of 1862–66, for which Lord Shaftesbury had moved, extended the area of state protection to women and to young persons working in workshops. But the working of Tory Socialism received its most striking illustration in the earlier Acts, which were so largely due to the untiring energy and noble zeal of Lord Shaftesbury.

The evidence adduced by him before the royal commissions of inquiry seems to have aroused the attention of working-men to the advantages which they themselves might procure through the reduction of the hours of labour of women and young persons; and the conviction spread that legislation might and must be attempted for men. This notion, all but dormant before 1837, was vitalized by the misery of the following years, when the labour question leapt to life in something resembling its present form. Strikes there had been, of course, before 1837, but none so well organized or so desperately fought as those of 1842 and 1843 in the textile, iron, and coal industries. For the present, most of the workers revenged themselves for defeat by supporting the Chartists; but their prudent members began to turn their attention more to labour questions than to an ultra-democratic franchise. For, after all, what was the value of a vote to most of them except to redress their most crying grievances? And if other means would work as effectually and far more speedily, why not adopt them rather than the "six points"? Why not try Trade-unionism rather than Chartism? The former movement brought a direct pressure to bear on the employer; while the latter staked all on the attainment of the points as a prelude to parliamentary interference. If many of their best friends looked askance at the Charter, obviously it was the best policy to drop the parliamentary question

for the time and trust to those instincts of self-help which are fortunately so strong in the breast of every Briton. As the capture of the strikes of 1842–43 by the physical-force Chartists had done harm both to Trade-unionism and to Chartism, surely it was better for Trade-unionists to leave the points to shift for themselves and to look after the sufficiently complex interests of the several trades. Such were the motives which after 1843 tended to separate the labour questions of the time from the distinctively parliamentary programme of the ultra-Radicals. After the temporary collapse of the latter in 1848 the self-help movement, whether trade-unionist or co-operative, received valued help from the advocacy of Kingsley, Maurice, and other far-seeing friends of the working-classes, and ceased, for the time at least, to have any close connection with the franchise question. This, apparently, was one reason why the Chartist and Radical cause remained all but stationary in the ensuing years, until the fervour of a few statesmen and the intrigues of parties placed within reach of town artisans the weapon of household suffrage for which they had vainly struggled in the "forties".

It is now fairly clear that the granting of this important political right by Disraeli's Act of 1867 decided the whole future of Trade-unionism. The year 1867 was indeed a critical one. Public opinion was deeply incensed by the trade-union outrages at Sheffield. Men listened only to the sordid details of bullying, rattening, explosion and murder, forgetting that these acts were largely due to the laws which banned Trade-unionism and allowed prejudiced judges to class as conspiracy all attempts peacefully to persuade workmen to a strike. Fortunately for all parties the searching parliamentary inquiry, which was held in 1867–69, revealed not only the sensational details of outrage, but the legalized injustice under which workmen in many of the cutlery trades suffered. It

condemned the law as well as the law-breaker. Furthermore, it showed that what Hallamshire needed was not less but more Trade-unionism. Outrages had been most rife in the trades which, for various reasons, had not been able fully to organize themselves. Completer organization was proved to have been accompanied by diminution of the use of brute force. Combination of the workers in legal trade-unions was therefore presumably a means of substituting more peaceful methods for the dastardly acts by which small groups of desperate men thought to better their position. Such a combination would at least provide a recognized channel for negotiations between masters and men in case of dispute.

The inquiry would certainly not have been so favourable to the workers had they not recently been enfranchised. As their votes were now of vast importance, it was evidently desirable to conciliate them. The change in the tenor of the inquiry between 1867 and 1869 sufficiently shows that not only conviction as to the justice of the claims of labour, but the desire to catch the labour vote, played a part in the deliberations at Westminster. Beginning with a general conviction of the need of repressive legislation, the inquiry ended with recommendations generally favourable to Trade-unionism.[1]

This soothing policy led to a marked change in labour questions. As Parliament now held the stirrup, it only remained for Trade-unionism lightly to vault into the saddle. One or two preliminary steps were alone necessary. The first was to form an annual Trade-union Congress, as was done in 1868. The next was to form the parliamentary committee of the Trade-union Congress, which is elected on the last day of the congress for the purpose of influencing labour legislation. The fruits of this activity were soon obvious. In 1871 came the act which gave to trade-unions a definite legal status

[1] Schulze-Gaevernitz, *Social Peace*, p. 97.

such as they had never previously enjoyed, and enabled them to prosecute fraudulent officials. Four years later, under a Conservative ministry, the law was modified in a sense even more favourable to trade-unionists. The Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act withdrew trade-unions from the class of suspected organizations, and conceded to them the right of using all peaceful means of persuasion even at the time of a strike. Indeed, a prominent champion of the cause admitted that the two statutes of 1871 and 1875 "constituted a great and generous measure of justice which none of us expected".[1] As a result, Trade-unionism soon lost the violence which goes hand in hand with illegality, and which therefore characterizes the cognate movement on the Continent. Nothing is more gratifying than the orderly and law-abiding spirit generally characteristic of English trade-union delegates, as contrasted with the anarchic outbursts of their continental brethren.

But while English Trade-unionism has been law-abiding, it has also been exceedingly active in moulding the law to its will. Some little time elapsed before the mass of workmen realized the full extent of the powers freely conceded to them by Parliament; but after grasping the facts of the situation, they have struggled for and obtained privileges which their forefathers would have deemed impossible. The way had also been prepared for them in 1864 and 1867 by factory legislation limiting the hours of labour for women and young persons to fifty-six per week. This restriction of time for women and young persons naturally aided the men in their endeavours to gain a similar boon; and as a matter of fact, before the year 1880 in most industries the men's hours were fewer than the legal maximum for women.

Previous to the year 1889 there was little if any de-

[1] Mr. H. Crompton: quoted in Appendix C of Howell's *Handy Book of the Labour Laws* (1876).

mand for universal legislation on the subject of hours of work. The cry for an eight-hours day for all trades constitutes a new and very significant departure. Parliament, it is true, had legislated for children, young persons, and for women, working in factories and workshops. But factory legislation for adult males was a very different matter, especially after 1867, when they had votes and were organized in powerful unions. The men of grit and independence who had fought the battles of Trade-unionism in the past protested against wholesale parliamentary interference on complex questions which had hitherto been decided between the masters and the trade-unions themselves. Such complete reliance on Parliament would, they maintained, cut the ground from under Trade-unionism; for what was the need of the unions, if their knowledge of the complex and shifting requirements of the several trades was all to be set aside in favour of an arbitrary code framed at Westminster? The demand for an eight-hours day by the fiat of Parliament might possibly be successful in the long run; but it would imply the abdication of Trade-unionism in favour of a State Socialism of the most rigid description.

In spite of these warnings the cry for a universal Eight Hours Bill grew in intensity and volume. It seems to have been powerfully influenced by a remarkable Socialist propaganda undertaken by the Fabian Society in and after 1886. That society, then abandoning the cautious methods which its name seemed to imply, entered the arena of party politics. Under the generalship of Mr. Sidney Webb,[1] the Fabians girded themselves for the conflict by forming a parliamentary committee somewhat on the same lines as that of the Trade-union Congress. The duties of this new body were "to organize Socialist opinion, and to bring pres-

[1] Fabian Tract, No. 41.

sure to bear upon Parliament, municipalities, and other representative bodies". Labour legislation of a more drastic type than trade-unionists had hitherto favoured, occupied a prominent place in the new propaganda; and there can be no doubt that the demand for an eight-hours day was largely due to the vigorous agitation thus inaugurated. The Labour movement speedily felt the effect of the new agitation and assumed the militant form known as the New Unionism. Among the many topics which separate it from the older trade organizations the most prominent is reliance on state control, which, as we have seen, had previously been viewed with distrust or dislike. It is questionable whether the new movement would have secured much support but for the worldly wisdom which associated it with the alluring programme of a universal eight-hours day. Not that this was mooted in its entirety at the outset. At first it was proposed for all men employed by government, by municipalities, and by other governing bodies. Next it was held out to miners, and secured the adhesion of the newly-formed National Federation of Miners. Finally, the proposal was brought up at the Trade-union Congress of 1890, in the following decisive form: that "steps should be taken to reduce the working hours in all trades to eight hours per day, or a maximum of forty-eight per week; and while recognizing the power and influence of trade organizations, it is of opinion that the speediest and best method to obtain this reduction for the workers generally is by parliamentary enactment". This wholesale regimentation of trades by Parliament was opposed by the delegate of the Durham miners, who moved that the "eight-hours day should be secured at once by such trades as may desire it"; but the champions of universal legislation carried the day by a majority of 8 in a meeting of 354 delegates.[1]

[1] Howell's *Trade Unionism, New and Old*, p. 174.

Not satisfied with throwing down the gauntlet, the challenge became more sweeping and stringent. In its extreme form, the proposal is that in every trade and district, work shall in no case exceed eight hours a day, or a total of forty-eight a week, overtime and extra pay being entirely prohibited. The fortunes of this programme have been instructive. The first efforts to reduce it to practice were made by the industry which claims the utmost consideration and sympathy. If any calling demands close and careful regulation by the State it is that which involves the discomfort and risk, the strain on muscle and brain, imposed on hewers of coal. Accordingly, an Eight Hours Bill was drafted on behalf of the colliers for 1892, when it was found that out of the five miners' representatives in the House of Commons three refused to support it. The reasons for this refusal are to be found in the sturdy independence of the Northumberland and Durham miners, who, having by their own associations and indomitable energy immeasurably improved their position, were not desirous of outside control. Their experience of the working of the well-meant Coal Mines Regulation Act of 1887 was not wholly favourable. As has recently been proved by the evidence forthcoming at the Labour Commission, they found the limitation of the hours of work for boys produced a scarcity of boys, which hampered the work of the highly-paid hewers. When the majority of men in one of the most important coal-fields rejected further government interference, and the authors of the bill refused to accept local option for regulating trade disputes, the measure was rejected by a majority of 112. The opposition of the Tynesiders has accordingly retarded the acceptance of a universal Eight Hours Bill, even by the industry which seemed most to require it.

Into the balance of evidence for and against the general proposal for an eight-hours day it is impossible

here to enter.[1] It is noteworthy, however, that the action of the miners themselves has tended to check the conclusions somewhat hastily recorded at the Trade-union Congresses of 1890–1892; and the sifting process, which forms a needful stage in every movement, was carried still further in the inquiry held by the Parliamentary Labour Commission of 1892–1894. The advantage of cross-examination over rhetoric has never been more strikingly illustrated than in the gradual weakening of the case for a universal Eight Hours Bill when sifted by the royal commission. The inquiry revealed not only the complexity of the problem, but the opposing nature of the claims urged on its behalf. Those who desired to raise wages stated that the change would not check production, and consequently would not absorb the unemployed; while those who benevolently desired to absorb the unemployed into the ranks of regular workers claimed that an eight-hours day would not increase the cost of production. Here, then, the question stands for the present.

One further result of the inquiry may also be noted. Such enthusiastic champions of collectivism as Mr. Sidney Webb and Mr. Tom Mann have implicitly, if not explicitly, conceded the impracticability of a wholesale regimentation of industry by national law. In his evidence given before the Commission, Mr. Mann admitted that it would be advisable that exemptions be granted when claimed by a local council composed of employers and workmen, and that a three-fifths majority of the adult workers in a trade should be necessary to set in motion the local administrative machinery chargeable with the working of the measure. Mr. Sidney Webb

[1] See Labour Commission of 1892–94, fifth report; also Mr. Drage's *The Labour Problem*, pp. 94–129, Mr. Rae's *Eight Hours for Work*, Mr. S. Webb's *The Eight-Hours Day*, Mr. Speyer's *The Labour Commission* (1894), and *Eight Hours by Law* (Fabian Tract, No. 48). In the last, a compromise called *Trade Inquiry* is recommended.

also conceded the principle of local option for the smaller industries, but asserted the need of general legislation for the hours of labour in the staple industries of the land, and of its execution by a department of the state.

The general impression produced by the evidence before the Labour Commission would seem to be that the interests and customs of localities, and even of different sections of the same industry, are too diverse to be ruled into line by a universal Eight Hours Bill. Many of the delegates of trade-unions who spoke in its favour evidently regarded it with apprehension in view of the severity of foreign competition, though others took the bull by the horns, and declared that the quality of work would be so much improved by knocking off an hour, or half an hour, as to afford the best, indeed the only, means of meeting foreign competition. Few persons would now deny that the reduction of the excessively long hours of work of the previous generation has improved the quality of work without reducing its quantity. The same may be granted with respect to the abolition of work before breakfast in some industries where the strain on brain and muscle is very great, and in cases where operatives have worked loyally and heartily under the new conditions. But it does not follow that an Eight Hours Bill would enable us to meet foreign competition. German masters, who closely watch our industrial affairs, show no great desire to shorten the hours of work, as they would assuredly have done if the argument as to the improved efficiency produced by short hours were completely sound and generally applicable. It would certainly be gratifying if the results of recent reductions of hours in our land were so uniformly favourable as to induce our continental rivals to curtail the length of their working day in the hope of compassing the ruin of England!

The value of a searching investigation by means of a

royal commission has rarely been more illustrated than in the question before us. The tendency of the new electorate, now that it has fully grasped the extent of its powers, is very naturally to call for wholesale remedies, in the fond belief that they will speedily produce the results aimed at. Not until twenty years had elapsed from the granting of household suffrage was any distinctly able and energetic move made towards the realization of State Socialism. After 1887 the move developed almost into a rush. Trade-unionism of the old well-established type, which accepted the wage-system as a final fact, capable of being modified only by the combined action of workers in the several industries, was threatened with deposition by the so-called New Unionism. This latter-day development was the offspring of the discontent created by the industrial stagnation of the eighties and of the new school of practical Socialism above referred to. It aimed at the capture of existing unions, or the formation of new unions, the latter to be merely "fighting machines", unencumbered by the provident clubs to which the older unionists had attached much importance. But the new unions were to be more than industrial fighting machines: they were to aid in the capture of Parliament and of projected local assemblies by labour representatives, who should exploit capitalistic industry in the interest of the workers. The socialistic aims of the more advanced labour leaders were set forth in the programme of the Independent Labour Party, which was formed in January, 1892. Despite its colourless title, the party put forward claims to "the collective ownership and control of the means of production, distribution, and exchange". Mr. Keir Hardie was the only successful candidate for parliamentary honours who went to the poll on this programme in 1892; and in 1895 he failed to hold his seat. At the last general election thirty Independent Labour candidates failed to

capture a single seat among them;[1] but they find some consolation in the fact that 12·1 per cent of the electors in those constituencies voted for the socialist ticket.

Hitherto this programme has gained only a meagre success. The reasons for the check suffered by it after the first triumphs of 1889–1892 are not easy to assign. The following suggestions are offered tentatively as explaining some at least of the tendencies of recent social and political developments. In the first place, it must be observed that the New Unionism had prospered on the discontent which inevitably accompanies stagnation of trade. Weary of uncertainty of employment and threatened reductions of wages, men naturally grasped at the new forward policy; and in the case of the famous strike of the London dockers for their "tanner" a day extra, and of the colliers in 1893, the new fighting policy gained a striking success. But the terrible sufferings endured by the colliers in the effort to prevent a temporary reduction naturally tended to sober the victors, and therefore to bring the New Unionism more into line with the older trade organizations. Moreover, the very aggressiveness of the new movement had tended to magnify its difficulties by compelling masters to unite and federate in self-defence. Instead of attacking single masters, it was now confronted with powerful federations of masters, who could weather the storms of a crisis or endure the even more trying torpor of depression by the aid of resources which neither the old unions nor the new could hope to rival.[2] Besides, had not the old

[1] Mr. John Burns, M.P. for Battersea, is not included in this number.

[2] As Mr. Mallock has shown in his *Labour and the Popular Welfare*, bk. iv. chapter 4, the power of the employer to resist a trade-union increases in proportion as the demands of the latter trench more closely on the margin of profit. The amount of trade-union funds decreased by £237,545 in the year 1893, mainly owing to the great coal strike. See Mr. Brabrook's "Progress of Friendly Societies in 1884–1894", in *Statistical Society's Journal* of 1895; and in ch. ii. of *Provident Societies and Industrial Welfare* in this series.

unions enormously improved the conditions of their members by steady insistence and dexterous bargaining; and would it not be better to follow more in their steps than to pursue a policy which would deplete their own funds and array capital in a solid phalanx against them?

Among other causes tending to give pause to the New Unionism must also be reckoned the increasing efficacy of self-help organizations, whether working in connection with, or on lines parallel to, the older trade-unions. Self-help was again slowly but surely reasserting its former influence over our wage-earning classes, as was shown by official statistics. It is true that the Liberator crash had seriously affected the position of building societies; but despite that terrible blow to the cause of self-help, the funds of savings-banks, friendly societies, &c., showed in 1894 a net increase of £60,008,834 over those of the year 1884.[1] If progress so substantial had been made in a decade remarkable for agricultural and industrial depression, what might not be effected under ordinarily favourable conditions, provided that the claims of ability and capital on the one side, and, on the other, the demands of labourers for the requisites of a decent existence, were mutually recognized?

Then, again, the labour programme of the new Fabians had to face the disadvantages which must ever attend the manipulation of party politics. It is true that the efforts put forward by the new labour party in 1890 had a considerable effect on the Radical programme, which Mr. John Morley put forward at Newcastle in Oct. 1891. An increase of the powers of the new London County Council, and the institution of district and parish councils, formed two planks of the so-called Newcastle programme. For a time it secured the adhesion of most Liberals; and as this enthusiasm for Hodge was fanned by the

[1] Mr. Brabrook's paper just quoted.

excitement attending the overthrow of a Conservative government, all went merrily, until Liberals realized that their Socialist allies regarded the new parochial councils as machines to be worked by collectivist steam. Then there was trepidation in the Liberal ranks, already discontented because the "old gang"—as Mr. Labouchere irreverently termed it—had absorbed most of the governmental prizes. In vain did the collectivists demand the municipalization of this and the parochialization of that. The spirit of the Manchester school was raised to warn off the new and dangerous allies, and to leave the Gladstone ministry free to devote all its energies to Home Rule.

The sequel is only too well known. The ministry, desirous of rousing the people for Home Rule and against the House of Lords, went to the country; and the country, by a vast majority, overthrew the Liberal Home Rule government. Since the general election of 1895 Liberals, Irish Nationalists, and Socialists have engaged in an interesting triangular duel, each party blaming the other two for the disaster, and declaring that, if its nostrum had been more to the front, things would have gone very differently. The Socialists stoutly affirm that had the Liberals carried through the collectivist programme, with which they dallied for electioneering purposes three years before, they might still hold the reins of power; but, as it is, their "Manchesterism has reduced them to this present pass".[1] As a Parthian shaft deftly sped into the uncovered flank of a former ally, the argument tells with effect. But the Liberal legionary may turn aside the bolt by reminding the Parthian irregular that the local elective councils, even the London County Council itself, were generally swamped by reactionaries; whence it would appear that collectivism has no more abiding charms when coaxingly

[1] G. Bernard Shaw in *Politics in 1896*, p. 97.

offered in municipal or parochial doses than when confidently prescribed as a national recipe.

For the present, then, it would seem that John Bull has elected to stand by old methods of tentative reform, and refuses to exchange his old dwelling-place, so long as he can patch and extend it at will, for any communistic *phalanstère*. The decision is what might be expected from his eminently practical, respectable, and conventional personality. As our whole inquiry has shown, the typical Englishman dislikes to leap in the dark, and only does so at the urgent invitation of party leaders whom he thinks to be sound men. On the whole, he much prefers to step cautiously, to hobble along rather than to leap. Such methods do not lend themselves to remarkable results; but they serve to build up a homely, if rather lumbering, political structure. These characteristics have led him to ponder over and sift the new and attractive programme put forward by able young leaders, and select from it only the more practicable proposals, relegating even these to his old industrial organizations for adoption or rejection as each may decide. Never was there such exasperating eclecticism! Well may it move the bile of adroit compilers of programmes.[1]

Meanwhile the interacting influence of democracy and the labour movement has served to bring about a strange reconstruction of parties. Cutting athwart the old party lines, it has necessitated strategic wheelings and movements to the rear, until the descendants of pre-reform Toryism find themselves, not without many searchings of heart, almost shoulder to shoulder with men who once waved the red flag of revolutionary Socialism. The party manœuvrings which led up to this result have been described in previous chapters. Disraeli's Reform Bill of 1867 gave decent burial to Toryism of the Lord

[1] See *Politics in 1896*, p. 86.

Eldon type, and necessitated the adoption of a forward policy of social reform and imperialism, on the due co-ordination of which rest the fortunes of the whole British race.

While this adroit leader was educating his party for the future, the Liberals remained wedded to the strongly individualist doctrines of the Manchester school, to which Socialists have always been more opposed than to the old Toryism. The way was therefore open for something like a *rapprochement* between the younger labour leaders and the more advanced Conservatives, such as Lord Randolph Churchill. The enthronement of democracy by the Liberal Reform Bills of 1884–85 tended to draw the extremes nearer together; for it inaugurated a period of sheer opportunism, in which each party strives to outbid the other in satisfying the practicable claims of labour. Thus we see the strange sight of a Conservative ministry pressing on a drastic Employers' Liability Bill, despite the plaintive groans of the ever-exploited Plugson, who imagined himself safe at least for the life of one parliament. And while a Unionist ministry is again at work "dishing the Whigs", the modern Socialist applauds the process. For he too has changed. He no longer wears the *bonnet rouge*: he has donned the silk hat. Under the lead of the Fabians, he has developed a keen sense of the superiority of parliamentary action to conspiracy and barricades. He therefore no longer conspires against Parliament, but strives to take it in tow. Still less does he wage unrelenting war on the capitalist; he exploits the exploiter. He does not kill the goose that lays the golden egg—that was the mistake of his French brethren in 1848 and 1871. His aim now is rather to submit her to a strict and salutary regimen, and to municipalize the eggs, leaving behind just enough to encourage the creature.

Chapter XV.

Democracy and Foreign Policy.

To the most casual observer it must be obvious, if he be not blinded by fanaticism, that neither on the Continent nor in the British Isles has democracy accomplished the sweeping changes in government which were anticipated by its warmest friends and bitterest foes in the earlier or revolutionary phases. Some of the political influences tending to retard its progress and moderate its ardour have been noticed in previous chapters of this little work. But there are others, having a wider effect than any yet noted, that possibly are even more potent than the mania for athleticism which absorbs energies that would previously have been devoted to politics. The most serious check to democracy has undoubtedly been the embittering of national rivalries, and consequent complications in foreign policy, such as no popularly-elected Chamber can possibly unravel.

Were it possible to review the course of events on the Continent, even a brief inquiry would probably suffice to prove the connection between national jealousies and that revival of autocracy which is so conspicuous a feature of the present age. A slight acquaintance with the course of recent continental politics will show that the potent force of nationality, which Mazzini believed to be essentially democratic, has strengthened the thrones of the rulers of Prussia and Italy, and more recently of Russia, who became its champions. The machinery of diplomacy and the discipline of the royal armies achieved the task which had defied the efforts of the peoples themselves. Nationality could only effect the unity of the German and Italian peoples by the aid of

state-craft; and since the triumphs of 1870, democracy has had to accept the compromise imposed by successful statesmen and rulers. King William of Prussia and Victor Emmanuel of Italy, along with their shrewd advisers, may therefore be regarded as the authors of that mixed form of government which admits the people to a considerable share in the legislative functions, but reserves questions of foreign policy and national defence almost exclusively to the control of the ruler and his ministers.

Now, it is clear that when a state, wielding powers so immense as those of Germany, adopts a mixed form of government, which is scarcely more democratic than that of the first Napoleon, an immense influence must be exerted on the polity of neighbouring states. The effect of militant autocracy on the fortunes of Western Europe has also been vastly enhanced by the pressure of the Eastern colossus. The predominance of Russia in European affairs even threatens to renew, though in a more guarded form, the Holy Alliance of the Eastern potentates, who assiduously endeavoured to put back the hands of the clock, not only in their own lands, but throughout the whole of the Continent. France, once the birthplace of new ideas, by her hostility to Germany, and her desire to gain Russia's effective help, is now reduced to a humiliating subservience to the wishes of St. Petersburg; and annoyance at the French occupation of Tunis keeps the land of Mazzini and Garibaldi in close alliance with the two central empires. It is the old story. The jealousy of the peoples perpetuates methods of autocratic rule which the progressives of 1848 and 1860 believed to have for ever passed away.

The experience of the past gives some cause for doubting whether popular government can be much more than a name under the burdens imposed by a rigorous militarism and the checks administered by secret diplomacy.

Vast armaments imply not only a crushing expenditure, but also methods of administration which are incompatible with free discussion and perpetual supervision by the people's representatives. Even in time of peace armies and navies must be controlled by a small number of highly-trained experts; and in general the efficacy of warlike preparations may be measured by the secrecy with which they are carried out by almost irresponsible officials, who can immediately dispose of great sums of money. Now, every one of these conditions is opposed to those claims of publicity and responsibility to the people's representatives, on which democrats have always insisted. The right to criticise officials is the alpha of popular government. It is the worst of sins in a soldier. His first duty is obedience. Partly, perhaps, for this reason our forefathers were apprehensive of a standing army, and took every means of reducing its numbers and powers lest popular liberty should gradually be undermined. It will be time to ridicule their fears when a democratic republic and a vast citizen army shall have existed side by side in France for more than one generation. Actual warfare is, of course, still more fatal to popular government. From the days of Cromwell to those of Bismarck, war has ever tended to exalt the one able leader, and to depress the authority of a Chamber.

To avert the horrors of war and the political reaction which it entails, states have recourse to diplomacy. But here again democracy enters on a province alien to its true character. Diplomacy demands secrecy and the concession of large discretionary powers to its agents. Democracy demands the discussion of every important compact, even of the steps leading to such compact, by the people's Chamber. Here is the Achilles' heel of popular government, and autocrats have ever aimed their deadliest shafts at this vulnerable point. Recent

events have brought this fact prominently into notice. In the spring of 1897 the French people were on the horns of a painful dilemma. Their generous instincts bade them befriend the Cretans and Greeks, for whom they have long cherished the liveliest sympathy. On the other hand, their hostility to Germany seemed to impose on them compliance with the dictates of St. Petersburg. Which should they obey, sentiment or interest? Under an autocratic system, such as governs the foreign policy of the central powers, a division of opinion would scarcely be allowed to become apparent: it would be smothered under the secrecy of ministerial discussion. Parliamentary government, on the other hand, required the public discussion of the alternative lines of policy, and ended with a division, which decided for self-interest and against quixotic sentiment. The discussion concluded, in this case, with a victory for the diplomatic course of action; but the mere fact of a public official discussion called attention to the division of opinion, and might have encouraged agitators to try to reverse the vote of the Chamber, had the division been less decisive. In any case, all the world knew that the coercive action of France against the Cretan insurgents was not the action of the whole people, but was resisted by a considerable minority.

The action of our Parliament and of our cabinet at that crisis is not without its features of interest, especially as it may serve to illustrate the advantages of a mixed system of government. A claim similar to that urged in the French chamber was put forward by several members of Parliament, that before our war-ships in Cretan waters took any decided measures of coercion, the sanction of Parliament should be gained. The answer of Mr. Balfour was short and decisive. He emphatically repudiated the claim of Parliament to dictate the action of Her Majesty's Ministers on this ques-

tion, and stated their determination to act without waiting for any expression of parliamentary opinion. That opinion, or rather public opinion, he said, might be exerted at the next general election, when the country would have the right to endorse or reject their policy; but, for the present, they would act, undeterred by any prospective votes of censure.

The difference between French and British procedure, in this instance, arose from the fact that the British ministry is, in theory at least, the ministry of the queen as well as of Parliament. On most questions, especially those dependent on money votes, the control of ministers by Parliament is tolerably effective; but in all matters of foreign policy and of administrative action the shield of the monarchy still intervenes between Parliament and the cabinet. Omitting any discussion of the instance cited, it is obviously desirable on broad grounds of expediency that such matters should not be submitted to direct parliamentary control.

One incident of the reign must be remembered in this connection, as upholding the prerogatives of the crown and preventing any encroachment even by an able and masterful minister. Lord Palmerston's precipitate action in regard to foreign affairs having produced friction in several cases, Her Majesty, in 1850, sent a sharp remonstrance to him, requiring his adherence to prescribed customs, and forbidding his interference with any decisions previously arrived at or documents drawn up. The secretary of state for foreign affairs accepted the merited rebuke; but on his renewed contravention of this understanding in 1851, when he hastily, though unofficially, recognized and approved Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état*, he was dismissed from office by the premier. The case has a more than personal interest. It marks the resolute maintenance by the crown of a direct influence and control over the details, if not the general

tenor, of the foreign policy of the United Kingdom; and few will now deny that the intimate knowledge of foreign affairs and of the wishes of rulers, possessed by Her Majesty, renders it most desirable that she should exercise a continuous control such as cannot be in the power of a cabinet minister whose tenure of office depends on the *vox populi*.

Many cases might be described where our foreign policy has been compromised by publicity. But in days when the South African Committee's inquiry is still fresh in the popular memory it seems needless to dilate on the disadvantages to the public service, or the advantages to proprietors of newspapers, resulting from methods suggested apparently by an admiration for the "chattering Greeks" of the late empire. On the other hand, it may be noted that in proportion to the determination of a British ministry to take energetic action, to that extent is publicity curtailed and the interference of Parliament firmly repelled. The most noteworthy instance of this almost defiant independence shown by our executive is afforded by the action of the Beaconsfield ministry in the early part of 1878. The threatening state of affairs at the close of the Russo-Turkish war certainly justified strenuous action. Despite the acceptance by Turkey of the Russian preliminaries of peace, the czar's troops continued to advance towards the glittering prize of Constantinople. To prevent the seizure of that seat of empire by Russia's legions, the British ministry, without consulting the opinion of Parliament, immediately took three decisive steps. It ordered the British fleet up the Dardanelles, it demanded a vote of credit for £6,000,000—more as a "vote of confidence" than as fixing a definite limit to war expenditure—and in the middle of April, when new complications arose, it suddenly ordered a contingent of our Indian troops to sail for Malta. The last order was

given only a day after Parliament had been soothed with assurances of a pacific character.[1]

Waiving any discussion of the melodramatic manner in which these decisions were revealed to the world when they were accomplished facts, it will probably be acknowledged by open-minded persons that the swift and determined action of the British government in those four critical months was the best preservative of peace. Without entering into the rights and wrongs of the case, but viewing it merely as a choice of methods in a grave crisis, it can scarcely be doubted that the nation which vacillates and consults is lost, as surely as the general who, in the midst of an engagement, nervously calls a council of war. When the question is thus stated broadly, as a question affecting the efficiency of our diplomatic intervention, only one answer seems to be possible: that while it is the duty of Parliament to supervise the general course of foreign policy and ratify all treaties, yet the conduct of negotiations and the details of any proposed intervention must be left to responsible ministers, who in such contingencies may often be most prudently guided by the advice of the sovereign.

Objections to this would seem to be founded on mere confusion of thought as to the real nature of democracy. Such objectors forget that, after all, democracy is only a form of government;[2] that while it assigns to the people a larger share in the representation and in the control of public affairs, yet it differs from monarchy and aristocracy in degree and not in kind. Neither of these forms of government, in Western Europe at

[1] See Hansard, April 16–19, 1878; also Buxton's *Finance and Politics*, ii. p. 245.

[2] The confusion of thought may in part have arisen from the common blunders of using the word "democracy" as if it were equivalent to "people", and "people" as equivalent to the "wage-earning classes". "Democracy" means, of course, "government by the people", *i.e.* the nation.

least, has ever been totally uninfluenced by public opinion. The pressure of popular feeling has always made itself felt in more or less direct ways on the most absolute of monarchs and the most selfish of oligarchs. Democracy has been mainly concerned with converting this indirect or spasmodic pressure of the multitude on the administration into a direct and regular influence. But it still remains a form of government. It is not a creed of life, as it was to Mazzini. That noble ideal vanished as the smoke of the last discharges of the Roman republicans rolled away on the fatal closing days of June, 1849. The seer, whose winged words had inspired the defenders of Rome no less than Garibaldi's heroism, looked forward to democracy as the initiatrix of a new life, a new civilization. That was not to be. The collision with actuality, the compromises, bargainings, and wars that followed, have left democracy merely a form of government, not a life. In the future, when the materialism of the present age has worked itself out, when selfishness has exploited everything within the walls of its prison house, when wars of nations or wars of classes have shattered the bomb-proof bulwarks of the most "civilized" states, then, at last, Humanity will assuredly recur to nobler ideals; and a new Christendom will arise. For the present, however, democracy is little more than a machine for producing the greatest happiness of the greatest number: it is not an inspiration to social duty. The fact must be faced with all its consequences. Chief among these are national jealousies, the resulting military expenditure which imposes the greatest burden on the greatest number, and the mutual fears which attune the Concert of the Powers to lugubrious strains.

Under these circumstances, popular government must retain many of the characteristics of that of the warring Teutonic tribe. The assent of all the warriors, so

Tacitus tells us, was needed for important affairs, but details were discussed by the chiefs in council. The distinction is rooted in the eternal laws of common sense, and can no more be disregarded by the present descendants of Hengist and Cerdic than by their immediate followers. Indeed, it is inevitable that the mere increase in the volume and complexity of the nation's concerns should relegate details of foreign policy more and more to the control of the people's chiefs. The division of powers is inevitable, and on the whole is most conducive to the due discharge of legislative business, and to the effective wielding of the nation's power in foreign affairs.

As a matter of history it cannot be denied that the powers of our cabinet have increased, especially in relation to international policy. The process has been so gradual as to escape general notice, except when some champion of parliamentary forms calls attention to a dangerous innovation. The increase has been partly concealed under the imposing fiction which names the ministers, Her Majesty's ministers. In this as in other respects, monarchical traditions have favoured the steady growth of administrative powers in the hands of the picked men of the predominant party. The advantages of a blending of democracy with monarchy are obvious when we contrast the generally effective control of foreign affairs by our cabinet with the crude efforts of the National Assembly of France in 1790–92 to regulate diplomacy. Ignoring the fact that democracy must under ordinary conditions remain a form of government, it endeavoured first and foremost to reduce the king's ministers to the position of head-clerks, registering the decrees of an all-powerful assembly. After realizing the impossibility of controlling the machinery of government by a crowd of debaters, it next delegated many of its new controlling powers to committees; and in the con-

fusion produced by the outbreak of war, these or similar bodies practically absorbed all the executive functions of the state, thus paving the way for the organized bureaucracy of the Directory in 1795–99, and the despotism of Napoleon.

The swiftness of this change may be commended to the notice of all who think that democracy implies the direct management of all public business by a popularly elected Chamber. In relation to the more complex and difficult parts of such business, notably foreign affairs, such a Chamber must be content to act as a final court of appeal, reversing actions that have been emphatically condemned by the electorate, but intrusting to its cabinet ministers and their subordinates the conduct of such affairs as cannot be controlled by a large number of legislators. Among the influences undermining the young French Republic none was more potent than the rabid suspicion of the executive entertained by the legislators. In the times of commotion and war that followed, the imperious needs of national safety transferred administrative control to a despotism far heavier than that from which France had escaped. But it is needless to multiply instances. The student of history is well aware that a complete and unmixed democracy has had a lengthy existence only in happy lands, which, as in the case of Switzerland, escape the burdens imposed by a complex foreign policy. Among these favoured countries the United Kingdom cannot be classed.

Government by public opinion has many recommendations. It is generally far more humane than the policy of diplomatists; and at present the gusts of popular passion would seem to be less dangerous to the welfare of the whole human family than the calculating selfishness of governments intent only on their own interests. As the power of the press begins to permeate the more

backward of continental peoples, and as facilities of travel mitigate the asperities of national prejudice, it may be hoped that public opinion will everywhere operate with greater power on governmental machinery, and wield it increasingly for the welfare of the whole world, and not merely of the fatherland. At present the progress seems slow, sometimes even it seems to be in the wrong direction. At any rate, the United Kingdom cannot afford to disregard the warnings which are only too clearly visible in the troublous past and the ominous present. While our land has adopted democracy for its internal government, it must retain in foreign policy that administrative machinery which imparts something of consistency to popular desires and strength to the national will. No country can so ill afford to admit flabbiness and vacillation into its external relations. No people has interests so world-wide, a commerce so sensitive, wealth so assailable on all the seas. It stands face to face in the west with a powerful but now friendly republic, which intrusts vast executive powers to a chief during his four years of office. In the east it is confronted by an all but oriental despotism, which wields all the governing powers of the Cæsars, and forces ten times as vast. Lying between these two powers, competing with the one in industry, with the other in policy, Great Britain cannot dispense either with the social invigoration produced by democracy or with the tenacity of purpose developed by monarchical rule.

Here, then, is a barrier to British democracy which we can scarcely overthrow without abdicating our position as a world-wide power. For other peoples such an abdication would be dangerous, but not suicidal, as it must be to our own. The inhabitants of the United Kingdom live in comfort, not on the resources of these islands alone, but by means of the wealth which their industry and commerce win from other lands. Only by

a firm and consistent policy can this easily assailable position be maintained. Hitherto it has been found difficult, if not impossible, for a purely democratic system to sustain a long struggle either in war or diplomacy against a polity constructed primarily with a view to the needs of war or diplomacy. The efforts of our people to cope with these difficulties present some interesting lessons. Specially noteworthy are the events of 1880 and of succeeding years. In 1880 it seemed that the people themselves were determined to direct the foreign policy of the land. The complexities of the task soon unfolded themselves. The Gladstone ministry, which was raised to power very largely by the generous enthusiasms of the people in foreign affairs, endeavoured to satisfy those claims. At once it found itself hampered by the obligations of the past and the difficulties of the present; and before two years were gone it disappointed the wishes of its most ardent supporters by the retention of Cyprus and by intermeddling in the affairs of Egypt. These and many subsequent events have opened the eyes of many who in 1880 had convinced themselves that foreign policy was the offspring of Lord Beaconsfield's oriental imagination and of a desire to divert the nation's energies from domestic reforms into labyrinths of adventure.

The sequel has dispelled those suspicions by revealing the intimate connection between our commercial prosperity and the maintenance of the empire. The earth-hunger of continental states, and their determination to treat their new possessions as strict commercial preserves, have induced the most insular of our manufacturers to take broader views than were current in the previous generation. For in the meantime free-trade has diffused our commerce and our wealth, thereby compelling statesmen to take means of securing it from attack. "Your triumph marks the end of the grand

era of English policy": these were the sentiments of M. Renan candidly expressed to Cobden.[1] Events have disproved the charge. The results of free-trade have led our manufacturers and merchants to become Imperialists. The Little Englanders of the previous generation have passed, or are passing, away; and the great manufacturing towns, which were once the strongholds of a somewhat narrow Radicalism, now vie with London and the counties in their desire to maintain our naval supremacy, and to secure the co-operation of all parts of the empire. The Birmingham of John Bright has become the Birmingham of Joseph Chamberlain.

The changed relations of the United Kingdom to the outside world are realized by the artisans of our great industrial centres. They are becoming increasingly conscious of the vastness and complexity of British commercial interests, on which their livelihood ultimately depends. The imposition of a hostile tariff by a British colony, the annexation of a large slice of Africa by France or Germany, the predominance of Russia in Northern China, may entail ruin on a British industry, or the extinction of a line of steam-ships. In this sphere Trade-unionism is absolutely helpless. Demonstrations and votes of censure will avail nothing unless they move our government to take decisive action. And such action, as I have shown, implies trust on the part of the people in responsible ministers, a trust which not only abstains from crippling their administration of the nation's funds for defensive and offensive purposes, but also enables successive governments to maintain a firm and tenacious foreign policy.

We have recently been passing (perhaps we have passed) through a phase of thought which is common to every young democratic government, and which wrecked that of France a century ago. The people's

[1] *Notes from a Diary*, by Sir M. Grant Duff.

representatives have suspected and nagged at those who are responsible for foreign affairs; and consequently our policy has been weakened by fits of vacillation such as rarely were known in the time of Pitt, Canning, and Palmerston. If the United Kingdom is to recover its rightful influence in the world, it will be not merely by vast armaments, but by the use of different methods in foreign affairs from those which must necessarily prevail in our domestic concerns. An electorate which is largely inexperienced may, possibly for several decades, enthrone the principle of flux in our home politics; but that same electorate will learn, perhaps by bitter experience, that unless our foreign policy is firm and continuous, we shall remain without an ally, and be condemned possibly to an unequal struggle even for the maintenance of our present possessions.

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